EASTERN STUDIES

JULIUS EVOLA

HERITAGE

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Julius Evola

Spiritual Virility in Buddhism

It is the fate of almost all religions to become, so to say, denatured; as they spread and develop, they gradually recede from their original spirit, and their more popular and spurious elements come to the fore, their less severe and essential features, those furthest removed from the metaphysical plane. While hardly any of the major historical religions have escaped this destiny, it would seem that it is particularly true of Buddhism. We need only consider the prevalent notion of the teaching of the prince of the Sakyas that has been formed not only in the West by those who profess admiration for Buddhism, but also for many centuries past in many strata of the peoples of the East.

The terms in which the 2500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha has been commemorated this year and the way in which the message that the Buddhist religion should have for the modern world has been spoken of, afford evidence of this.

While someone has lately been able to say: "There is no other alternative: the world today must choose between the H bomb and the message of the Buddha"—thus identifying that message with pacifism and humanitarianism—the Western friends of Buddhism have been almost unanimous in appraising it as a sentimental doctrine of love and universal compassion, a doctrine composed of democracy and tolerance, to be admired also for its freedom from dogma, rites, sacraments: almost a sort of secular religion.

It is true that these distortions appeared quite early in the history of Buddhism. But though it may seem audacious on our part, we have no hesitation in saying that this is a *falsification* of the message of the Buddha, a deteriorated version suited not to virile men, standing with head erect, but to men lying prostrate in search of escape and spiritual alleviation, for whom the law and discipline of a positive religion are too severe.

If we accept the interpretations referred to, Buddhism in its real essence would be a system of ethics rather than a religion in the strict meaning of the term. This character, which some historians of religion had stressed in an attempt to charge Buddhism with supposed inferiority as compared to theistic and dogmatic

religions, is today claimed by others as a merit, their claim being based on a misapprehension of a different but not less serious kind. If Buddhism, taken in its original forms cannot be called a "religion," this depends on the fact that it is not *below* but *above* the plane of all that can be legitimately defined as "religion," especially theistic religion. The doctrine of awakening and enlightenment, the essential core of Buddhism, has nothing "religious" about it, because it is preeminently of an "initiatic" or esoteric character, and as such is accessible only to a few elect. It therefore represents not a "broad way" open to all (as in more than one of its aspects, almost in its very name, the Mahayana was) but a "straight and narrow path" reserved for a minority. This is already made clear by the accounts given in the canon of the first moment of the enlightenment of the Buddha. When Prince Siddharta had the revelation of the truth and of the way, the *dhamma*, he resolved not to spread it, believing it to be inaccessible to the masses, to the natures not noble, immersed in *samsara*. And so, from the way the story is told, it would seem that only through the mythical intercession of certain divinities the Buddha was induced to change his mind and to consent at last to communicate and announce the possibility of the Great Liberation and the path to be followed to attain it.

It is known that in the beginning the Order of the *Ariya*, the noble "sons of the son of the Sakyas," was restricted, even if not by extrinsic limits. Thus for instance, the Buddha objected to the admission of women. And those who like to see in the attitude of the Buddha towards the conception of caste and the exclusiveness of the Brahmanas, evidence of an equalitarian and universalistic spirit, are much mistaken. They confuse that which lies beneath the differences and limits proper to every sound hierarchy (as is the case with democratic equalitarianism, whether social or spiritual) with that which lies above such differentiated structures, as in the case of the really awakened Buddhist and of the initiate in general. The comparison drawn between the Awakened One and a flower that rises miraculously from a heap of dung[1] is pretty eloquent on this point, even if it be not edifying to those who indulge in a democratic and humanitarian interpretation of Buddhism. Considered in the framework of the Hindu situation of his day, the Buddha was a revolutionist only in so much as he opposed to the fictitious and obsolete dignities, corresponding no longer to real qualifications, true dignity, to be shown in each case by works and effective superiority. Thus, for instance, he maintained the designation of Brahmana, but opposed the type of the real *brahmana* to that of the false one.[2] If in the case of Buddhism one can speak of universalism, this is the universalism of the summits, not the promiscuous one at the base.

The reduction of Buddhism to mere moral teachings appears as the height of

absurdity to anyone who remembers the canonical parable of the raft. In no spiritual tradition more than in Buddhism is the purely instrumental and provisional character of morality, of *sila*, so strongly stressed. As is known, the whole body of moral rules, with good and evil, *dhamma* and *adhamma*, was compared by the Buddha to a raft that is built for crossing a river, but which it would be ridiculous to drag along when the crossing has once been made.[3] Contrary to the view, whether philosophical or religious, which ascribes to some moral rules an intrinsic autonomous value (a typical instance of this is the so-called "absolute morality" of Kant's categorical imperative) the Buddha ascribed to the several attitudes of right conduct that he pointed out, a purely instrumental value, the value of means justified only in view of a certain aim and therefore only *sub conditione*. But this end, just as the higher grades of Buddhistic ascesis and contemplation, is beyond morality, nor can it be measured by the religious conception of "holiness." As Milarepa was to say: "In my youth I committed some black deeds, in my maturity some white ones; but now I have rejected all distinctions of black and white."[4]

Thus the fact that some of the rules of the *sila* may perhaps correspond to what the moralists may desire, should deceive no one. The spirit inspiring the action in the two cases differs fundamentally. This holds good also for that which the "spiritualists" admire so much in Buddhism: the ethics of love, of compassion, of innocuousness. He who follows the path of the awakening cultivates these mental attitudes only as the means for freeing himself from the bonds of ignorance, of the samsaric ego; not out of sentimental altruism. A conception such as the Western one, expressed by the words: "God is love", with the consequent absolutization of this sentiment, would be for the authentic Buddhist doctrine an absurdity. Love and compassion are mere details of the *opus remotionis*, whose aim is a liberation, an enlargement or opening of the soul which can favor, in some cases, the "rupture of the level" and the sudden flash of illumination. Thus not only is the famous series of the four *brahmavihara-bhavana* or *appamanna*, which includes love and compassion, technically and practically equivalent to the several states of a purely "dry" intellectual contemplation, leading to the same goal (the four *jhana* and the *arupa-jhana*), but even in the series of *brahmavihara-bhavana*, the last stage, *upekka*, is impassibility, the disincarnate neutrality of a soul that has got free from all sentimentality, from both the bonds of the "I" and the "you" and shines as a pure light in an ontological super individual essentiality expressed also in the symbol of the "void", sunna or *sunnyata*.

We are not the only ones who have noted that this notion of the void is not affirmed only by the Mahayana, but is found already clearly stated in the canon of

early Buddhism. The work proper to Mahayana has been rather that of making this notion the object of a paradoxical philosophical elaboration (paradoxical because this idea corresponds to an absolutely super-rational level detached from philosophy) to which Mahayana added a popular soteriological religion which carried the misdirected interpretation of the precept of compassion to a form that, *inter alia*, leads to a flagrant contradiction in the system of this form of later Buddhism. In fact on the one hand the precept of compassion and love for all beings is announced to such a degree that the Mahayanic *Bodhisattva* vows that he will not enter nirvana until all living creatures have been redeemed; while on the other hand, according to the Mahayana doctrine of the universal "void," all these beings would be non-existent, would be so many illusions, mere apparitions of the cosmic dream generated by ignorance. This contradiction and nonsense alone should suggest that to the precept spoken of and also to the doctrine of universal illusion must be given a meaning that differs widely from the exoteric, literal, and popular one attributed to them. Both the one and the other should be understood on a purely pragmatic plane.

Both in some aspects of the Mahayana, in which alone the esoteric doctrine of the "awakening" has been replaced by a "religion," and in other currents, the essential core of Buddhism has been enveloped by philosophical, mythological, and ritualistic dross and superstructures. When considered in relation to them, the so-called "Zen"-Buddhism stands for a return to the origins, a reaction in all respects similar to that of early Buddhism itself to degraded Brahmanism. Now the Zen throws into clear relief the essential value of illumination, its transcendency in respect of all that which, in the several cases, may favor it, and at the same time its immanency, that is to say the fact that the state of enlightenment and nirvana does not mean a state of evanescent ecstasy, an escape, so to say, of which compassion is only a pale reflex accompanied by horror of all that is action and affirmation; it is instead a higher form of freedom, a higher dimension; for him who holds fast to it there is no action that cannot be performed, and all bonds are loosened. This is the right interpretation of the doctrine of the void, of the non-ego, and also of the Mahayanic conception of the identity of *nirvana* and *samsara* in a third principle higher than either and anterior to either. That should be recalled to those who accept unilaterally the theory of innocuousness, of the timorous respect of all forms of life. As a matter of fact, Zen Buddhism could be called the doctrine of the Samurai, i.e., of the Japanese nobility[5] who are certainly not noted for their abhorrence of arms and bloodshed. The fact is that the pivot on which all this wisdom turns is one only: the severance of the bond of the ego, the destruction of ignorance, the awakening. When the bond of the ego is severed, all restrictions cease. On the human soil on

which the seed of the doctrine falls depends the fruit it will bear. The humanitarian, pacifist, vegetarian figurine of the Buddhist is a distortion, and in any case its acceptance is not compulsory. A Samurai and a Kamikaze may equally well be a Buddhist. From a book in which a Buddhist chaplain describes the days of the Japanese put to death by the Americans[6] we see how these men died without conversions or repentance, in a perfect state of Buddhist grace; men who if they were not "war criminals" as the victors claimed, were as generals, officials and politicians certainly not delicate shy flowers of the field.

Those who have experienced that fundamental inner transformation, that "rupture of the level" which is the essential feature of Buddhist realization, are in possession of an unshakeable calm, an "incomparable certainty" which not even the age of the H bomb and of all the other devilries of the modern world can disturb; which can be preserved above all tragedies and all destructions, even when man's human and illusory part is involved. Now, it is in this direction rather than in any other that lies the message that Buddhism may have for our days. At the conclusion of one of our works[7] in which we tried to reconstruct the essence of the Buddhist doctrine, we pointed to the dual possibility it offers. The first is that of a clear and virile *askesis* which creates in man firmness and serenity, *samatha*, by means of a carefully built up technique of the mind which allows the detachment and strengthening of a principle that transcends the purely human, irrational, emotional and in general the *samsaric* substance of our being. In no other tradition are these techniques taught in such a clear, thorough, we might say scientific form, free from specific religious or ethical implications, as they are in Buddhism. What here is of particular importance is the style of the clear vision, *yatha bhutam*, which is that of a superior realism, the vision exactly in keeping with reality. A goodly number of gifted men can still make an "immanent" use of Buddhist teachings thus understood. We may even find in them the corrective of the prevalent trends of our day: the religion of life, of struggle, of "becoming," the union with irrational, instinctive and sub-personal forces that ever urge man on in a "flight towards" (Bernanos), destroying in him all centrality, all real consistency. In an age like ours, *samsaric* as no other has ever been, already that which as a system of free and virile *askesis* in Buddhism is mere preparation for ultramundane realization, might serve to create limits, to provide inner means of defense, to keep at bay the anguish or the rapture felt by those who cling convulsively to the illusory mortal Ego; this—let us repeat it—is not to be understood as an escape, but as a means for assuring a serene and superior security and liberty. And it is in view of the times that are approaching that perhaps never so much as now has there been need of men educated along these lines.

But in the Canons we find opposite the use of such disciplines for life to the use of them for carrying us "beyond life."[8] It is here that Buddhism presents itself as the doctrine of awakening, identical with a strict doctrine of initiation, which as such is timeless (*akalika*), not tied down to historic contingencies, superior to all faiths and all systems of mere devotion. It is not easy for the Westerner to realize what the real purpose of Buddhism is on this level. The ideal here is the absolute unconditioning of being, the attainment of absolute transcendency. By now the puerile idea of those who identified nirvana with "nothingness", or regression into the unconsciousness of a kind of trance determined by the distressing know ledge that" life is suffering", has been to a large extent discarded. Also the teaching that "life is suffering" belongs only to the exoteric aspect of Buddhism. The deeper meaning of the expression *dukkha* is "commotion," is agitation rather than "suffering": the condition that the *ariya*, the "noble son," rejects is that of universal impermanence, of the transitory—a state that should therefore be essentially understood in ontological terms, and whose emotional significance is quite secondary. Its counterpart is thirst, *tanha*; and the extinction, the nirvana in question, is not destruction in general but precisely and only the destruction of what in the being is thirst, insatiable longing, fever, and attachment, in its many forms and branches. Beyond all that lies awakening and enlightment, the *samhhodi* which leads to the unconditioned, the immortal.

Perhaps the antithesis between the initiatic notion of "awakening" and the religious and more especially Christian notion of "salvation" or "redemption" has not yet been adequately stressed. The religious conception is based on the assumption that man is a being existentially detached from the sacred and the supernatural; because of his ontological status of creature, or as the result of an original sin, he belongs to the natural order; only by the intervention of a transcendent power, only on the assumption of his "conversion," of his faith and of his renunciation of his own will, only by Divine action, can he be "saved" and attain to life in "paradise."

The implications of the notion of "awakening" are entirely different; man is not a fallen or guilty being, nor is he a creature separated by an ontological hiatus from a Creator. He is a being who has fallen into a state of sleep, of intoxication and of "ignorance." His natural status is that of a Buddha. It is for him to acquire consciousness of this by "awakening." In opposition to the ideas of conversion, redemption, and action of grace, the leading motive is the destruction of "ignorance," of *avijja*. Decisive here is a fact of an essentially "noetic," viz. intellectual, and not emotional nature. This confers an indisputable aristocratic character on the doctrine of Buddhism. It ignores the "sin"-complex, self-abasement, and self-mortification. Its *askesis* is clear and "dry"; it is alien to the

features of auto-sadism or masochism which are always present in the forms of the asceticism more known to the West, and which have often given rise as to a reaction among Westerners to anti-ascetic prejudice and a distorted exaltation of life.

This character of loftiness, which is due to Buddhist ontology, is matched by the Buddhist doctrine of autonomy: man is the free master of his own destiny. He alone is responsible for what he is. Thus in conformity with his vocation, he can confirm the state in which he is, or he can change it. There are no penalties and no rewards; therefore there is nothing to hope for and nothing to fear; the only things that must be taken into consideration are objective, unsentimental, extra-moral connection of cause and effect. If a Buddha sets himself free, it is by his own efforts alone. On the path leading to awakening no external aid is to be looked for. This conception, on which already pivoted the traditional Hindu notion of *karma*, is particularly stressed by Buddhism. The historical Buddha, as is well known, did not present himself as a divine savior, but as a man who, after attaining by himself enlightenment and the Great Liberation, points out to those having a like vocation the path to follow. All this refers to early Buddhism. With Mahayanic Buddhism in its prevailing and popular aspects, we descend once more to the level of the soteriological religions; myriads of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas busy themselves to assure the salvation and happiness of all living beings.

Again, if we turn to the *terminus ad quem*, i.e., to the ultimate ideal of Buddhism, the break with religious conceptions is a clear one and it is difficult for Westerners to grasp fully. In the West we are accustomed to consider as a religious ideal "Paradise," the survival of the believer in heaven, and only a few mystics speak of the unitive life, of union with the Being. But the Buddhist doc trine looks on all that as too little and it left it behind. Its horizon is that of the traditional Hindu metaphysics, which consider the divine worlds as themselves belonging to *samsara*, for which immortality does not consist in the perpetuation of individuality but in the realization of the Unconditioned; nor the Being here is the supreme point, that beyond which nothing other is conceivable. The Being is matched by the Non-Being and the Unconditioned is that which is superior and anterior to both. In a well-known sequence[9] the Buddha rejects and condemns one by one all the identifications: identification with the body, with the elements, with the Ego, with the cosmos, with the divine hierarchies, even with the God of Being, that is to say with the Brahma. In a speech which is Michaelangelesque in its grandeur, identification with the God of Being, which is equivalent to the *unio mystica*, the ultimate limit of religious rapture, is rejected in terms that see in it almost a diabolical temptation,[10] for it would represent a limit to the great Liberation, to the attainment of the Unconditioned.

He who has a knowledge of these dimensions of the Buddhistic experience, dimensions that appear clearly in the canonical texts, what can he think of those who consider that Buddhism is not even a religion but a system of sickly sentimental secular morality, consisting of humanitarianism and indiscriminate love, the pale evanescent wisdom of one who has recognized that the "world is suffering"? Undoubtedly, the metaphysical dimensions of Buddhism just referred to can only be grasp? ed, let alone achieved, by very few. But the ultimate background of the whole system is indeed that. The canonical saying is known: "All the waters of the ocean have but one flavor, that of salt; so the sense of the whole of the Law is only one, that of liberation."[11] For the ultimate, the great nirvana, or more correctly, the "void," the *sunna*, the Buddha uses the method of the so-called "negative theology"; it is unnameable, indefinable, in comprehensible to the human mind; one can only say what it is not, not what it is, for one cannot even apply to it the category of being. But how ignore what may be called the traces, the marks of Him who has no marks? Because "the lord of men and gods" was called the perfectly "awakened One." As "unconquered and intact beings," similar to "lofty Supermen" appear those who have travelled along this path[12]; like lions in whom anguish and terror are dead[13] they see the past, they see the heavens and the infernal regions,[14] they know this world and the world beyond, the kingdom of death and the kingdom free from death, the temporal and the eternal.[15] They are "like tigers, like bulls in a mountain cave" though they appear as "beings free from vanity, who have appeared in the world for the good of many, for the health of many, for compassion of the world, for the good, the profit and the health of men and gods."[16] "I have passed beyond the brambles of opinions, I have acquired power over myself, I have reached the path, I possess the knowledge, I have none who guide me" says the Awakened One of himself.[17] He is the "daring One who never hesitates, the sure guide, free from passion, bright as the sunlight, free from pride, heroic"; he is the "One who knows, who is dazzled by no fevers, overcome by no troubles, tempted by no victories, stained by no stains"; he is "the great being who lives apart, freed from all ties, no longer slave to any servitude"; he is the "worthy One who keeps watch over himself, of steady step, ready to the announcement," "inclined to none and disinclined towards none, sublime in soul, powerful, impassible"; he is "the One whom no thirst burns, no smoke dims, and no mist wets; a spirit who honors sacrifice and who rises up majestically as no other does."[18] Passions, pride, falsehood have fallen away from him like mustard seeds from the point of a needle. Beyond good, beyond evil, he has cast off both chains, and detached from pain, detached from pleasure he is purified. As he knows, he no longer inquires: "How so?" He has reached the bottom of the element free from death. He has left

the human bond and the divine bond and has freed himself from all bonds; no one in the world can conquer him, who has for his domain the infinite and whose path is known neither by the gods nor by angels, nor by men.[19]

Notwithstanding the hyperbolical element in some of these attributes, from them takes definite shape an ideal type against a background of grandeur and spiritual virility which it would be hard to find in any other tradition, beside which the religious values of "sanctity" itself pale and droop. Judged by this standard, far from being a doctrine accessible to all, a doctrine that makes things easy for the "spiritualists" because it has no dogma and no rites, and is free from exclusivisms, the Buddhist path of awakening is, as we have said, a narrow one reserved to those who possess an exceptional vocation and qualifications, and in following it, it may be said that the saying of the *Katha-upanisad* is also applicable: it is like walking on a razor edge while no help, either human or divine, is given.

It is agreed that wisdom of this kind cannot be "popularized." Indeed, it should not even be indiscriminately communicated for it is not without risk" the canon itself speaks of the consequences of the doctrine if wrongly interpreted: it is like one who having seized a serpent in the wrong way, sees it pounce on him, producing death or mortal pain. It stands out and remains a summit, bearing witness to what a superior humanity could conceive. As to the forms in which Buddhism has become a religion *sui generis*, and, worse still, as to those forms in which it is conceived and appreciated as a democratizing humanitarian morality, they should be rightly considered as an unparalleled contamination of the truth.

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Notes

[1] *Dhammapada*, 58–59.

[2] Cf. *Suttanipata*, I, vii, 21; *Digha-nikaya*, XII, 1. 24–26, 28; *Dhammapada*, 141.

[3] *Majjhimonikaya*, XXII.

[4] *Vie de Milarepa*, trans. Kazi Dawa Samdup (Paris, 1955), p. 81.

[5] Kaiten Nukariya, *The Religion of the Samurai* (London, 1913).

[6] Shinsho Hanayama, *Heiwa no Hakken* (Tokyo, 1949). Translated into Italian by G. Morichini, in the Bocca edit., under the title *La Via della pace* (Rome, 1954).

[7] J. Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening* (London, Luzac and Co., 1951).

[8] Cf. for example *Majjhimonikaya*, LII.

[9] *Majjhimonikaya*, I.

[10] *Majjhimonikaya*, XLIX.

[11] *Anguttara-nikaya*, VIII, 19.

[12] *Majjhimonikaya*, CXVI.

[13] *Suttanipata*, III, vi, 47.

[14] *Samyutta-nikaya*, III, 58–59; *Dhammapada*, 422–23.

[15] *Majjhimonikaya*, XXXIV.

[16] Ibid., IV.

[17] *Uravagga*, III, 21.

[18] *Majjhimonikaya*, LVI.

[19] *Dhammapada*. 420 sg. and passim; *Majjhimonikaya*, XCVIII.

Karma and Reincarnation

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At the centre of its doctrine, Theosophy, as we mentioned, intended to bring the attention of modern men back to the truths of a forgotten wisdom, in regard to which, as its source, it referred above all to the Orient and in particular to India. To which teachings of real value could Theosophy attract attention? And what misunderstandings and deformations are superimposed on them by Theosophical assumptions and vulgarisations?

Here we will limit ourselves to the examination of two notions that are pivotal to the Theosophical conception: karma and reincarnation.

In the Hindu tradition, karma means "action". One fundamental view of this tradition is that "from action (karma) this world was created, from it, it is sustained, from it, it will be dissolved". In particular: "The being arises in conformity to actions (karma). Beings are the heirs of action."

These statements are clear in themselves. They allude to a general and elementary law of causality. It is only necessary to note that here the term "action" – karma – is applied not just to action in the strictly material sense, but embraces a much vaster type. Every thought, every desire, every habit is equally karma. Besides, karma extends to orders of influence elusive to the common man; it connects effects to remote causes from much different planes; it goes beyond the limits of the visible and of a single form of existence and unlike what happens through the laws of physical causality, it does not unfold only in the dimension of time. Nevertheless, what remains in it is the character, easily seen in the laws of nature, of impersonal relationships in a necessary sequence. So, when it is about man, the law of karma does not say to do or not to do, but states simply the happenings of an effect, once a given cause has been created. It informs and does not determine. If one is free, for example, to light or not light the fire, one can not then pretend that the fire, one lighted, does not burn. In terms of karma, this notion must be extended to everything that exists in the manifest world, whether as corporeal world or as psychic, moral, intellectual and spiritual world, both in the lives of men and those of invisible forces and of the "gods". According to the doctrine in a word, everything forms itself, transforms itself, or passes on in this way, as above as below: through pure relationships of cause and effect.

One is therefore in the order of a universal determinism, which however does not exclude freedom, but rather presupposes it as the initial cause, beyond a beginning virtually capable of producing new causes, new series of tendencies, actions, and reactions, in agreement with or opposed to what is already in act. What karma excludes are the ideas of both "chance" and "destiny" and of "providence" in the anthropomorphic sense of the principle of divine interventions or sanctions of a moral character.[1] Action and freedom therefore exhaust this vision of the world. Every being is what it makes itself. Karma only draws the consequences from created causes and the I with the current of its life only follows the ditch that it, knowingly or not, dug itself into. So guilt and merit, sin and virtue – in the Western sense – do not even exist. There are only material, psychical, or spiritual "actions" that will

necessarily lead to certain material, psychical, or spiritual conditions. A priori, all lives are open, above and below. Self-determined by one of them, there is nothing to hope for or to fear, except what will proceed impersonally from the nature of this life. In the most absolute sense, each thing and each being are left to themselves.

This teaching leads to a purification of the glance. It accustoms us to consider each thing under a lucidity and a law of *reality* analogous to that which is in force in the free world of things. It liberates us from the fantasies of both fear and hope. It leads back to itself as to something simple, strong, self- supporting. And that is the premise of every higher realization.

Such is the sense of karma according to tradition, to which its notion legitimately belongs. But what became of it in Theosophy?

First of all, karma moves from the idea of freedom to a typically modern type of evolutionistic determinism. Instead of the plurality of free paths – which from the point of view of the individual is the elementary truth, every further conception belonging to the metaphysical plane[2] – it substitutes the unique direction of an obligatory "progress", in which there would only be the alternative of following sooner or later.

In fact, according to the Theosophical views, the "gods" and the adepts would be beings who had gone further ahead in "evolution"; the animals, "our younger brothers", less "advanced". But it will be a question of time: everyone will reach the door, those who are further ahead "sacrificing themselves" for the others; and the varieties of karma will have served only as instrument to "universal progress". As is clear, all that can only be considered as a digressing and distorted addition of Theosophy to the authentic notion of karma. It should therefore not cause surprise if this notion often passes from the plane of a transcendental realism to a more or less Philistine moralism, becoming a type of sword of Damocles suspended over the head of whoever does not conform himself to the "laws of evolution" and to the related altruistic, humanistic, egalitarian, vegetarian, feminist, etc. corollaries professed by the movement. With that, even the practical value, the liberating potentiality of this teaching, which we already mentioned, must be lost completely.

In Theosophy, karma has a specific connexion with reincarnation. Theosophy praises itself for having brought to the attention of the West this other "teaching of ancient wisdom". In reality, given the limitation of the horizons of modern men, for whom this existence is the beginning and the end of everything, nothing comes before and after it, apart from the vague religious idea of the afterlife, which at this point no longer even constitutes a living idea – given this limitation, to arouse the sense of coming *from far-off*, of having experienced many other lives and many other deaths and of being able to still advance from world to world, beyond the end of this body, would certainly be a plus. The bad thing is that in Theosophy the whole is reduced to a monotonous series of existences of the same type, that is, terrestrial, separated by intervals of a more or less attenuated corporeity. So the limitation is precious little removed from it. Theosophy believes it can support itself on an ancient doctrine, but in reality it is based only on forms of it that are in fact exoteric and popular, and have no sense of the order of things in which they should be arranged.

In order to resolve the problem of reincarnation one should begin with clarifying that of survival, which Theosophy is not concerned with in the least, as much as its positive "spiritualistic" solution and, to tell the truth, as personal survival of every human soul, it seems certain to us. The closest idea to reincarnation as the Theosophists profess it is found perhaps in the Vedanta. But the Vedanta has a basis to it: it has the theory of the Self, of the immortal and eternal Atman, identical to the Brahman, the metaphysical principle of every thing. This theory refers to a spiritual state of man's consciousness which is no longer to be found in the men of today, but formerly in the humanity of the Buddhist period. In Buddhism we find in fact the doctrine of the *anatma*, that is, of the denial of the essentiality of the soul and of its continuity whatsoever. Here it is not a question – for Vedanta compared to Buddhism – of two philosophical opinions opposed to each other, but of two theories that are different only because they refer to two historically different spiritual positions. The soul (atman) that Buddhism denies is not what the Vedanta affirms. The soul of the Vedanta is none other than what Buddhism considers not as a present reality in each man but rather as a means that can only be reached exceptionally by means of asceticism. Here one could establish a relation with the esoteric sense of many traditional teachings and myths, even Western, as for example with that of the "Fall". It is about ascertaining, at a given moment, the identifying of the personality with a conditioned psychic form and separated essentially from the body: from here, the birth of the "I", which a modern man can relate to; the "I", whose transience and unreality Buddhism, on the basis of a metaphysical realism, asserts reasonably and forcefully.[3]

Now the sense that reincarnation could have in those in which the "I" was more or less directly valid as a universal principle, superior therefore to every particular individuation (atman = Brahman, Vedanta) is not the same as the sense that the same doctrine of the most recent times can have if brought back to the ordinary human "I" and closed in on itself: in the latter, the contacts are severed, there is no longer anything that, like an unchanging silk thread, traverses and unites an indefinite series of pearls representing the singular existence. With the sense of self joined univocally to the support of a body and a brain, the outcome can be the definitive alternation of that continuity of individuated consciousness that already with birth (which extinguishes the memory of all prior experiences)[4] has at once a first blow. In the face of this existence, the spirit as "personality" is also facing a fundamental risk. And it is no longer a question of reincarnation in the Vedantic sense: instead, it is a question of a choice of "salvation" or "perdition" that, in a certain measure, is decided on this earth. Perhaps such are the sense and the concrete historical raison d'être, of the teaching on the subject that are taken up in the more recent traditions, as for example the Catholic or Islamic.[5]

For the average Western man this teaching is therefore true, it is no longer reincarnation in the Vedantic sense. So if today one still wishes to speak of reincarnation, one can no longer speak of it through the soul as personality, but through other principles included in the human entity and always in a sense that excludes, furthermore, a true continuity of personal consciousness. He can tell himself that that which in the present conditions is eternal and what is transmitted from being to being is no longer the "immortal atman" (the superpersonality), but it is "life" as "desire", in the Buddhist sense of the term.[6] It is the deep and animal will to live, in the terms of a species of subpersonal entities that create an always new birth, that is the matrix of every mortal I, and, at the same time, the barricade to higher worlds. We are therefore brought back to things to which we noted already in the treatment of psychoanalysts [see Chapter III]. If at this point we want therefore to continue to speak of reincarnation and of

karma, the vision according to reality needs to be sought in teachings of the Buddhist type, which has in view precisely the transient soul or, as an exception, the soul liberated in the state of nirvana through asceticism.

According to Buddhism, a man who has not reached awakening and spiritual illumination with his thoughts, words, and actions (karma) has nevertheless generated another being or "demon" (called *antarabhava* or also *vijnana*) sustained with its unsatisfied longing for life which receives fundamental tendencies from it. In general, this being survives death. The inevitable force of the inclinations which comprise it and which no will still restrains, leads it back to earth, towards a body and a life conformed to its nature; joining itself to physical and vital elements provided by parents, it constitutes the basis for the self-manifestations of other entities below the type of man which, distorted themselves by "desire", join each other there and assimilate according to laws of affinity, coming up short of other states of existence. A *new* human consciousness is born In such a manner, as an entity rather more complex than what is commonly believed, composed of diverse inheritances; an entity, which does not have a true relationship of personal continuity with the one that died. However, on the one hand, a law of cause and effect (karma) can lead back to the preceding life, the origin of what, as a specific form, became the *antarabhava*, and on the other can explain why the composite inevitably attracted the new being that is incarnated.[7]

Apart from the "spirits", the ghosts and psychic residues which we spoke about in the critique of spiritism [see Chapter II]; apart from the *antarabhava*, the blind creature sprung out from the trunk of desire – nothing else survives death, conforming to personal continuity, in anyone who already in life has not achieved a certain degree of illumination. If instead this degree was reached – only then can one speak of a survival through the *soul*: the soul can, preserving the continuity of consciousness, also face those post *mortem* experiences, for which we have already cited a lamaic text and the totality of which could be designated with the term *purgatory;* to face them in a way to be able to achieve this or that state of existence beyond the human and subhuman world. In every case, only what belongs to the earth comes back to the earth. The "soul" does not come from other bodies, but from other worlds, that is, from other conditions of existences, and does not go into other bodies, but if it escapes the "hells" by adapting itself to its supernatural ends, it goes into others of these "worlds". The repeated passage of the soul (not of this or that psychic complex of which the soul of mortal man is composed) under the condition of a human body represents an absolutely exceptional case. Through the soul there can therefore be *transmigration*: something in fact distinct from *reincarnation*, which can be verified only through inferior principles of the human compound, of the most collective and impersonal sort.

In its general lines, things stand thus through reincarnation in relation to present-day man. What echo is there in its doctrine that Theosophy asserts instead? Every theory or superstition – let us repeat– is always, under whatever aspect, a barometric index of the times. One can say that "reincarnation" is a correct idea if it refers uniquely to that irrational entity that, having used up a body, in its uniform and inexhaustible thirst for life passes into other bodies, never elevating itself to a higher plane.

Since in our days the beginning and the end of life for the greater number of men is used up in a similar way of being and the case of "liberation" presents itself more and more as an anomaly, so it can be said that for humanity of the present period reincarnation in the sense of a perennial terrestrial re- arising has a certain margin of truth, apart, naturally, from what optimism adds to it in the direction of "evolution" and "progress" and apart from the supposition of everything gratuitous, of an "immortal ego", in place of which there is instead a precisely "natural" and subpersonal entity with its creatures not connected in any true continuity and with its *appetitus innatus*, the root of every becoming in temporality and which the Orient calls *samsara*.

Also on this topic, one can point out the lack of every truly supernatural view as a characteristic of Theosophy. From the point of view of the human state of existence, there is not a true supernatural without a premise of dualism, and the "evolutionistic" conception of Theosophy flatly contrasts with that premise, asserted by every higher civilization. As in the Catholic tradition there is a very clear boundary between the temporal order and the eternal order, so in the Oriental traditions there is a clear distinction between the endless series of possibilities and of "rebirth" subordinated to becoming and desire (possibilities that include as many "divine" states as human and "infernal" states) and true liberation. That series is represented by a perpetual circle (a concept that is found again in the Hellenic tradition: ho kyklos tes geneos) and here every "progress" is illusory, the mode of being does not change substantially even when they reach forms of existence well beyond the common level. Liberation corresponds instead to an exceptional way, "vertical" and "supernatural", equally far and equally close in respect to any point whatsoever of becoming and time. Instead, Theosophy abolishes this opposition: the two terms are placed on the same plane; the supreme goal is conceived as the end of an "evolutionary" development through the conditioned world and an endless series of rebirths. So where it speaks of a development, it is not the personal soul that it can have in view, but rather the natural and animal stock of "humanity", and its "spiritualism" is, at bottom, reduced to a mystical addendum to the utopias of collective social progress with those exigencies and preoccupations that, from a higher point of view, seem to as more worthy of the name of zootechnology than of ethics. Then, as to the immortal "ego" given to everyone, it is precisely what happens by putting to sleep, by averting the reality of the alternative: *salvation or perdition* which is to be resolved in *this* existence – therefore by preventing the way of true liberation.

Such an anti-supernaturalistic spirit of Theosophy is evident not just here. Among the principles held by the movement there is that of the immanence of "One Life" in every form and in every being, and there is, at the same time, that of the duty for individual "egos", to achieve an independent self- consciousness. With an odd application of the anti-aristocratic concepts typical of certain new morals, they even speak of a renunciation of the primordial divinity that was "possessed without merit", in order to then re-attain it oneself … "deservedly" through struggle battle and hard experiences of the repeated immersions in "matter". That, in Steiner's reformed Theosophy, corresponds to a complete plane in which "Ahriman" and "Lucifer" were duly enlisted. Thought through, this view should lead, as a logical consequence, to that "One Life" – that is, the aspect "one" of Life – it represents the "least", the substrate, or *materia prima*, from which every being forming itself, should differentiate itself as a distinct beginning; therefore, putting value precisely on a law of difference and of articulation. Instead no: the "One Life" becomes the goal, the perfection.

In spite of the various calls back to the traditional way of super-human conquest and the occult tools gathered from the most varied sources, the idea of development in Theosophy is coloured by mystical tints and inclinations toward the degenerating direction of a simple blending of oneself with the substrate of the undifferentiated “One Life”, rejecting the “illusion of separateness” and of the “ego”.

Even here, it is about the confusions that proceed from the incomprehension of a metaphysical teaching indistinctly seen: since the purely metaphysical notion of the “Supreme Identity” has nothing to do with the notion of “One Life”. It is a serious error, moreover, equally committed by certain neo- Vedantist currents, distinct from Theosophy and directly imitating the indiscriminate teachings of other gurus of today, epigones of Hinduism, to also exchange the promiscuous *pantheistic One*, in which, to quote Hegel, everything becomes equal as in the “night where all the cows are black”, with the *metaphysical One* that is the integrating summit of a well articulated, differentiated and ordered whole, of forms, of a cosmos, in the Greek sense. What is, in Theosophy, the effective reference point, is seen, moreover, from the consequences: from the corollary of the democratic ideals of brotherhood, love, egalitarianism, universal solidarity, the levelling of the sexes and classes, in place of that virile law of hierarchy, difference, and caste that the great traditions have always known when they had the right direction for a living axis: that of the integration of man’s supernatural dignity into the suprasensible. And this is one of the most determinate points, in which, even in formerly outer circles, apart from the doctrinal confusion, the Theosophical current together with various other “spiritualistic” currents akin to it, constitute a factor that in the crisis of contemporary civilization meets the others at work on so many planes precisely in the direction of a regression into the collective and the promiscuous.

Footnotes:

[1] This conception, for that matter, is not exclusive to Oriental teaching. In classical traditions, the same notion of "providence" did not have a "moral" character, with relation to the care of a god theistically conceived, but it was thought, precisely, as a collection of conditioned and impersonal laws, as they could be the warnings, to do it or not, given by the objective science of a doctor – to use this Platonic example. (Enneads, III, iii, 5)

[2] Effectively, the traditional teaching knows the idea of a higher order, which corresponds to the Far Eastern notion of the "Way of Heaven" (Tao), to the Hindu *rta*, to the Hellenic "cosmos". But it is a valid idea precisely only in the metaphysical sphere and therefore must not be confused with the human notion of "design". An allusion to the relationships between this higher order and the plane of freedom and of causality (karma) is given, if ever, by images like that of de Maistre, whereby the universe is comparable to a watch which always shows the right time, even though each of the gears moves by its own reckoning, or as in the Chinese saying, that order is the sum of all disorders. However, there is no tangible interference.

[3] It is interesting to point out that the period of the birth of Buddhism (circa 600 BC), assertor of the doctrine of anatma, coincides with that of the rising of philosophic and naturalistic thought in the Orient and above all in the West (Greece): that is, with the manifestations of logical consciousness tied to the brain, which takes the place of anterior and superior forms of consciousness that constituted the existential basis of doctrine, as in the Vedanta.

It is rather important to take account the great traditional doctrines are not mere human inventions, and their differences are not arbitrary, but relative to the adaption of the teaching to essentially different historical- spiritual conditions of things.

[4] One understands therefore why Catholicism, the relation to the period in which it was formed, had to declare *heretical* the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul to the body. In reality, the soul, as only "human" soul (and today one cannot speak broadly of different souls), is born with the birth of the body.

[5] The worsening of the alternative: salvation-perdition, which can be observed in Protestantism in respect to Catholicism, must be explained with the character every more physical that the I has assumed in the times, still more recent, of the Reformation, contemporaneous to so-called "humanism".

[6] As was already noted, translated into moral terms, this notion corresponds in Catholicism to the theory of the inheritance of "sin" that the flesh of man would bring, from Adam, as *cupiditas* or *appetitus innatus*.

[7] One can designate the irrational form with which a soul identifies itself and remains composed of various human psycho-vital functions, with the term *daemon*, in the classic sense, and to remember the Plotinian teaching that the soul "has chosen ahead its daemon and its life" in conformity to the nature of the tendencies that it developed in itself (Enneads, III, iv, 5-6)

TAOISM

THE MAGIC, THE MYSTICISM

Julius Evola

TAOISM

According to tradition, Lao-tzu and Confucius were contemporaries. The former lived between 570 and 490 B.C.; the latter between 552 and 479 B.C. Their teachings do not represent something new but rather are a reformulation and adaptation of the primordial Eastern tradition based on the *I-Ching* and its commentaries. This reformulation became necessary due to a partial dulling and dimming of that tradition. Both Lao-tzu and Confucius participated in this reformulation; though from two different perspectives. Because of the difference between these two perspectives, people often claimed to notice an antithesis (which in truth is only relative) between the Taoist and the Confucian teachings. Lao-tzu's doctrine essentially has a metaphysical and initiatory nature, even in its ethical and social ramifications, while Confucius' doctrine is centered on the moral, social and political dimensions. The Taoist ideal is the disciple who is and who acts beyond all possible limitations, beginning with the limitations rooted in himself. The Confucian ideal, conversely, is limited to an ideal typical of human culture, namely to the ideal of the "noble man," who, in the context of political society, develops a style and an uprightness through the practice of some positive virtues and through specific behavioral patterns.

While Confucius prefers a rational approach, Lao-tzu employs paradox as an hermeneutical tool. Lao-tzu develops non-conformist views and professes a subtle wisdom, which is often expressed in mysterious, elusive and bewildering terms. These two approaches are contradictory only when either one is perceived as absolute and final. Only a particular version of Confucianism, which degenerated into the Mandarins' formalism and into a system of external precepts, is antithetical to the essentially metaphysical doctrine of Lao-tzu. According to the Chinese historian Ssâ Ma Chien, Confucius uttered this statement after meeting Lao-tzu: "It is possible to set a trap in order to catch animals; it is possible to catch fishes with nets and to catch birds with arrows. But how will one capture the dragon which flies in the air, above the clouds? Today I have seen Lao-tzu. He reminded me of the dragon."

On the other hand, in Taoist writings, beginning with Lieh-tzu's, Confucius is often portrayed as a disciple of Lao-tzu, or as a teacher of Taoist doctrine. All differences considered, the Chinese perceived an intimate connection between Confucian and Taoist teachings. This connection exists because both masters drew inspiration from the common source of the primordial tradition and orthodoxy.

It should be noted that Confucius' historic existence as a particular individual has been proven, and that we have rather specific details concerning his life. This is not the case with Lao-tzu; thus, one may wonder whether this name corresponded to a person or whether it was a symbolic designation. We do not even know his real name, since Lao-tzu is essentially a title. It literally means "the old child." There is a popular legend according to which he was born with the features of an old, white-

bearded man. However, in Chinese tradition, old age also carries a metaphorical meaning, being a synonym of eternity and even of immortality (i.e., the correct translation of the name of a famous Chinese deity, *Hwang-Lao-Kum*, is not "Old Yellow Master," but rather "The Immortal Lord of the Center," as yellow is the color of the center).

Thus, Lao-tzu, or "Old Child," specifically designates the attributes of perennial actuality, duration and youth proper to those who maintain contact with the origins, just as the "men of Tao" are credited to have done.

According to some, Lao-tzu was a historiographer assigned to the archives of Lo, the Chou Dynasty's capital. In the ancient Chinese Empire, just as in ancient Rome, the "officials" were believed to be invested with a sacred character. Also, the "historic archives" contained the documents of tradition, and sometimes they were kept so secret that, reportedly, those in charge preferred to be put to death rather than surrender them to someone, rulers included, who could lay no claim to the privilege. Anyhow, Lao-tzu should not be considered as a bureaucrat or file clerk. Eventually, this character left his position in order to spend his life in solitude. After condensing the essence of his doctrine, he wrote a book at the invitation of the guardian of the *Han-ku* Northwestern mountain pass, and the mysterious Lao-tzu disappeared into the West and was never heard from again. He left the world of his time, and, according to the historian Sse Ma Chien, "Nobody knows where he went."

In popular legends, Lao-tzu, upon leaving the Empire, withdrew to K'un Lun, a mountain bordering Tibet. For Taoists, this mountain eventually assumed the symbolic character of a "center." There, he settled in the "Mysterious Capital," a designation which later was applied to the seat of the Yellow Turbans sect of the Taoist religion. According to other legends, Lao-tzu died at the age of 81, which is a most symbolic number, since 81 is a Taoist sacred number corresponding to Heaven and to the perfect fulfillment of the *yang* quality. It may also be noted that Lao-tzu's book consists of 81 short chapters. This fulfillment, which implies the overcoming of the transitory, generated another legend that implies Lao-tzu continued living, as one of the so-called "immortal earthlings."

According to another set of legends, either several people changed their names to "Lao-tzu," or there has been more than one person with that name. This explains the different dating ascribed to Lao-tzu by various biographers. Aside from the deification which Lao-tzu underwent in *Tao-chiao*, namely popular Taoism (just as it happened to Buddha when Buddhism turned into a religion), people fancied about a super-temporal "Lao-tzu" ("born before Heaven and Earth," reads an inscription dating toward the end of the 2nd century B.C.) who appeared under various names in thirteen consecutive existences following Fo-Hi and Cheng-Nong. This super-temporal being was an initiator of "real men" and the occult inspiration of the sacred monarchs who founded the dynasties up to and prior to the Chang and Chou Dynasties. Some even claimed that "Lao-tzu" was the founder of the T'ang dynasty. All these traditions should not be viewed as mere fictions. The positive content which can be gathered from these legends is the relationship between Lao-tzu's doctrine with a non-human influence and with an initiatory current strictly associated to the royal function.

The role of "Lao-tzu" has allegedly been played by various people, including the historic Lao-tzu, provided there ever was one. He is supposed to have continued an initiatory chain and to have been a prominent figure in it; his own name, after him, may have passed on to other members of the same chain, since in that context individual beings do not matter as such. As far as the *Tao-Te-Ching* is concerned, it certainly contains original formulations and even if there are some personal references to its author, the relationship of the doctrine found therein with the primordial tradition, has never been questioned. Aside from frequent references to the origins and to the teachers of old, during the early stages of the Han period (2nd century B.C.), it was common opinion that Taoism had begun with the first Chinese emperor, Hwang Ti (2697-2598 B.C.), the so-called "King of the Center" or "Yellow Emperor." During that time, the imperial patriarchal society displaced a matriarchal society. The sense of the ideal relationship between "Lao-tzu" and Hwang Ti was so acute, that for a long time one of the Taoist doctrines was that of *Hwang-Lao*, a term composed with parts of both names. Analogously, the *Tao-Te-Ching* was associated so closely to the *I-Ching*, that another name for the doctrine was *Lao-I*.

The works of Lieh-tzu, who was the second of the founding fathers of Taoism, were the creation of an entire trend of thought rather than the product of one individual. There is uncertainty as to whether this figure existed historically or symbolically.

We are certain, however, of the historical existence of the third founding father of Taoism, Chuang-tzu. His work abounds with personal references but the teaching expressed in it is distorted and diluted in many areas. Poetry and short stories are prevalent, in contrast to the essential, dry and shining style of Lao-tzu.

As far as the *Tao-Te-Ching* is concerned, it should be noted that this was not the original title. The text was given that name only during the later Han Dynasty or Hou Han (25-220 A.D.), that is, centuries after its compilation.

Ching as I have said, is the designation reserved to traditional texts. The more current translation of the text's title is "The Book (*Ching*) of the Way (*Tao*) and of its Virtue (*Te*)." I have changed this to "The Book of the Principle and of Its Action." This modification shows the fundamental ideas contained in the text, which is comprised of a metaphysic, an ethical system, a political doctrine, and finally, the elements of an esoteric doctrine of immortality.

In relation to pure metaphysics, the notion of *Tao* was known prior to Lao-tzu, it is found in all the Chinese schools of thought or orthodox teachings which are derived from the tradition of the *I-Ching*. Literally, as well as in the ideogram, *Tao* means "Way." It is the Way in which the All moves around. However, the term did not originally have a univocal meaning, since on the one hand it designated the "Great Principle" (although the main designation for it was "The Great One" or the "Great Vortex," *T'ai Ch'i*); on the other hand, it designated the sense of the world's course, the productive force and the immanent law of the manifestation of the Principle. In the title of Lao-tzu's work, these two aspects of the *Tao* are distinguished; the *Tao* is the Great Principle; its action, "virtue" or law, is the so-called *Te*. Such a distinction concerns the terms of a dynamic unity; and in this way, the characteristic Far Eastern *Weltanschauung* is found in the *Tao-Te-Ching*.

To make this clear, it must be remembered that the tradition in the East has had

from the beginning a metaphysical and not a religious character. It ignored anthropomorphism and the humanization of the divine and instead focused on abstract and impersonal principles, which remained such even when they were described through material images taken from the world of nature. Thus, the Chinese spoke about *T'ien*, heaven, and not about "god." *T'ien* symbolizes transcendence. It was a figurative example of the Great Principle's infinite height, towering over and above the human dimension. Even when *T'ien* was personified in the State religion as the "Lord Above," (*Shang-Ti*), it never ceased to have an impersonal character; *Shang-ti* was described in relation to the above mentioned Great Principle with the title *Hang T'ien Shang-ti* (the highest Heaven, supreme god). This is the first characteristic of a Far Eastern *Weltanschauung*; it has a superhuman purity and traits which are essentially metaphysical. At the same time this *Weltanschauung* ignored the dualism of a supernatural world opposed to this concrete world. This fundamental unity has been recognized in the terms of what may be called an "immanent transcendence," despite the sense which it conveys, of what is infinitely far away and of what is non-human. The *Tao* of heaven is unreachable and, at the same time, tangible and really present within the "net" of phenomenal reality. In the *Tao-Te-Ching* this type of metaphysics is taken up, described in further detail and developed in an original way. Here the transcendent dimension of the Principle is again expressed through the specific employment of concepts such as emptiness, non-being, non-action, formless, or nameless, all of which indicate the supreme, detached essence of the Great One and of the Great Beginning. This Great Beginning is superior and prior to the "Being" of theistic and religious theologies.

Virtue (*Te*) is present as the immanent and acting aspect of the Principle. It is the power that unfolds the eternal manifestation of Perfection. This manifestation does not have a "creationist" character, in the theistic sense of the word; in other words, it is not related to a creating will and to a specific intent, but is part of the eternal, immutable and impersonal logic of the Divine.

In Lao-tzu, the term "way" refers to the concept of the One, which is not expressed in static terms, but in those of an eternal process, in which immanence and transcendence not only coexist, but influence each other and generate each other from the same one act. Here lies the characteristic feature of the doctrine found in the *Tao-Te-Ching*, which, if it could be reduced to the terms typical of mere intellectual speculation, would be mindful of some ideas of so-called European transcendental philosophy. Such a metaphysical situation is well expressed by Lao-tzu when he says that the Principle is (and that it produces by) "becoming empty." The image of a bellows (ch. 5) is used to designate the eternal act which, on the one hand, produces "emptiness," while on the other hand, gives being to the stream of forms, or to the "ten thousand beings." In several passages where the Principle is presented as a model, this idea is portrayed as an act of self-denial or as *not-being*, in order to be. It is almost an act of self-transcendence which, on the one hand, realizes the Principle as "emptiness," as absolute and as center; while, on the other hand, it exteriorizes and becomes free of substance in the course of an inexhaustible and impersonal process of giving, emanating and vivifying. Thus, it has been rightly suggested that in the context of Taoism, Lao-tzu's "virtue" is the means which the Principle itself needs in order to actualize itself.

I had mentioned earlier that what is given here, in a sort of metaphysical transparency, is what can be gathered from various confused myths, relative to the "sacrifices" of divine beings who originate creation.

There is found in this doctrine a mutual conditioning and a simultaneous presence of transcendence and immanence, both hyper-substantial non-being and being as the ultimate meaning of the Way of Heaven and also of the eternal development of the world. This is the origin of a view of non-being as an omnipresent substratum, or as the inner and essential dimension of being. Judging from yet another perspective, every thing, every being and every life-form is contained in the Way and in Perfection, and has never been outside of it. One Taoist teacher said: "If anything was, or existed outside the *Tao*, the *Tao* would not be the *Tao*." This doctrine originates the theories of spontaneity and of "natural" perfection, as well as the ethics of being in the Way, in virtue of just being what one is. On this matter there is a visible convergence of Taoism with Mahayana Buddhism, which upholds the transcendent identity of *samsara* (the contingent world) and *nirvana* (the Unconditioned), as two aspects of the same one reality. Because of this and other convergences (such as the one concerning the metaphysical notion of Emptiness, which is common to both schools of thought), an interesting symbiosis took place in China between Buddhism (imported in its Mahayana version at a time of a revival of Taoism) and Taoism. This symbiosis appears in various schools, from the ancient Chinese *Ch'an* to its derivatives, such as Japanese Zen. The above mentioned view about immanent transcendence and natural perfection was subsequently expressed by Zen, which claimed that every being has a Buddha nature and is "liberated," yet without being aware of it.

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At this point I wish to discuss the Virtue (*te*) of the Principle, considered under its aspect of ordering power. It should be noted that in ancient Chinese language, *te* did not have a moral connotation (which it acquired only after the advent of Confucianism) but rather it evoked the power of action (during the Middle Ages in the Western world, mention was made of the "virtues" and "signatures" of a substance or of an element) and most of all, the power of magic. Magical power was designated both as *ling* and as *te*. In this sense the Chinese spoke about the five powers (*wu te*) which enabled the Chinese Dynasties to reign. This is also the case of *te* conceived as the virtue, or action, of Heaven. The teaching of the *Tao-Te-Ching* is that, due to the real presence of transcendence within immanence, a higher order is realized in the world in an invisible and spontaneous way that is somewhat magical and typical of "non-acting" Taoism. The expression "non-acting" means that what is taking place is not direct divine intervention in the course of human events, with regulating and moralizing purposes, as in the case of the theistic theology of Providence, but rather a superior influence, which is not confined to specific ends or intentions, and which is uncaring about individual existences (without "any wish to be benevolent," says Lao-tzu.[2] While allowing freedom to things and beings, this influence combines the totality of events in such a way as to mirror the Great Unity

and Perfection. The Taoist images employed are those of the net of Heaven, which has large meshes, but from which nothing ever escapes (*Tao-Te-Ching*, ch. 73), or that of the bottom of a great valley which does not act, but toward which all the waters running on the slopes, irresistibly descend and converge; this character possesses the Virtue (*te*) of the Principle. There are also some sayings of Chuang-tzu, which further exemplify this notion: "It is the *Tao* that overspreads and sustains all things. How great It is in Its overflowing influence!" [3]

Generally speaking, or in non-metaphysical terms, *te* is also conceived as a "power of presence." Beings and things can be centers of *te*, especially "real men" and "transcendent men." They are said to "act without acting," mirroring in this the *Tao*. In other words, they exercise in an impersonal way an irresistible and efficacious influence, just in virtue of their presence, without performing any action or developing any particular intention, hence the passage from the metaphysics of *Tao* to the ethics and politics of the *Tao*. When the previously mentioned ideas are added to this particular view of *te*, the overall cosmic picture which emerges is one of an inexhaustible process of flowing and generating, which is permeated by "Emptiness," and one of an eternal and immutable law which operates, through the magic of Virtue, within every change, directing without touching, dominating without imposing itself, bringing to completion without doing anything in particular. In this inscrutable action there is the principle of the actions and subsequent reactions, which was already described in the metaphysics of the *I-Ching*. I will mention here two instances, as far as Taoist metaphysic is concerned. The first instance concerns the traditional theory of the metaphysical Dyad, which was already outlined in the teachings of the *I-Ching* as well in the doctrine of the *yin* and *yang*. The manifestation of the *Tao* unfolds through the alternated interplay of *yin* and *yang*, which are opposite and yet complementary and inseparable multivalent principles. They are the eternal masculine and feminine; the active and the passive; Heaven (in a limited sense) and earth; the luminous and the dark; the creative and the receptive, and so on. The *I-Ching* had reduced the structure of every process, being and phenomenon to various dynamic combinations of these two powers or qualities, immortalizing them in the system of tri-grams and esa-grams, which are signs composed of *yin* and *yang*. It is through the *yin* and *yang* that the Way of Heaven operates. A particular idea which often recurs in the *Tao-Te-Ching* is that of the conversion of opposites. There cannot be an indefinite increase or development of a given quality, whether it be *yin* or *yang*; once a quality reaches its peak, it encounters the limit beyond which the overturning, or the conversion into the opposite quality occurs. For instance, a peace protracted beyond the limit generates disorder and war; an extreme disorder produces order; the ascent is followed by a descent (a popular proverb says: "When the moon is full, it begins to set.") In this system, the invisible, regulating, rectifying and compensating action of the Virtue of the Great Principle is manifested, as if in an immense circular process.

The second instance concerns the notion of mutation, *yi*, in which, according to both *I-Ching* and Taoism, the intimations of production, creation, development and becoming are summed up. Beings and things appear, become and disappear, in virtue of a "change of state." In everything that happens, rises and declines (in birth, life and death), there are only changes of state. This is a fundamental view in

the metaphysical systems of the East. In the Principle, the potentialities of being are present in a pre-formal state. Through the eternal power of the One (equated in this aspect to the feminine functions of bringing to life by generating, of feeding and of nourishing), these potentialities assume a formal state (as we shall see, "corporeity" is a synonym of this state) and thus enter into the stream of transformations. They could remain in this stream, caught up in an undetermined situation, analogous to that of the Hindu *samsara* and of the Hellenic *kuklos tes geneseos* (the cycle of generation), if attachment to a form still persists in them. This situation, though, should not be understood in terms of reincarnation, namely as a necessary and repeated reappearance in the human condition, but rather as "transmigration," since being a human being is just an episode in the chain of transformations. In that event, these potentialities undergo a crisis of discontinuity caused by the various changes of state, namely by the "going out" (being born) and by the "coming back" (dying). These crises can be overcome when these potentialities separate themselves from the formal condition and become integrated into that Transcendence which is present and active in Immanence. When this occurs, they become "men of *Tao*" or "men of the Way." In technical language, according to the etymology of the word, "transformation" ("to go beyond the form") corresponds to the second case; transformations of the first case, taking place in a "horizontal" sense, in a succession or in a cyclical pattern, are mere "changes of state" and metaphysically irrelevant. With the exception of what is proper to the domain of esoteric Taoism, to which I will refer later on, and from the absolute point of view of this doctrine, not unlike Vedanta and Mahayana (Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart may be considered their Western counterparts), the difference between these two conditions consists in a pure matter of consciousness. It has already been said that according to this point of view, nothing is ever outside the Way or the Great Perfection. In the *Tao-Te-Ching* this is expressed by the saying "Great, it passes on. Passing on, it becomes remote. Having become remote, it returns."[4] In the stream of forms, the end and the beginning get mixed up and, as another text suggests, "They become illuminated by a great light."

Therefore, what according to the men of Tao must be the way to follow, derives immediately from metaphysics. This way consists in excluding any extroverted action which proceeds from the peripheral center, as well as any action aimed at strengthening and at expanding this peripheral center, constituted by the exteriorized formal existence (the empirical, individual Ego); this is done in order to *be* and in order to *act* while remaining within the realm of transcendence. Transcendence is the metaphysical "empty" dimension, always present beyond all changes of state, where one can find the true root and the essential, indestructible center of all things.

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Let us now consider the domain of personal realization as contemplated in the *Tao-Te-Ching*. At the heart of the text is the figure of him who is called *cheng-jen*. Over and over, Lao-tzu describes the type, the behavior, the nobility and the way of

acting of this figure. The dependence of ethics on metaphysics is here very evident. In the *Tao-Te-Ching* what comes first are the metaphysical *enunciates*; then, through the conjunction "so" or through another analogy, what is proper to the *cheng-jen* is evidentiated. This being is patterned after the Way, nor after a human moral ideal. While in Lao-tzu the prevalent term is *cheng-jen*, in Taoism we encounter the other terms *chen-jen* and *shen-jen*, which identify a being often identified with the first one. It is necessary at this point to find a term best suited to translate *cheng-jen*. The terms which are most often used by translators, the "Saint" or the "Wise Man," should be excluded. While the term "Wise Man" is linguistically correct, it still evokes a poetical and philosophical image in the West, it evokes figures such as Socrates, Plato or Boethius, even though these types are still very different from the Taoist ideal. Besides, the *cheng-jen* as "Wise Man" is closer to the ideal of exoteric Confucianism, which is ideologically very distant from Taoism. The term "Saint" is even less suited because of its moral and religious connotation, which is absolutely lacking in the *sheng-jen*. The *sheng-jen* also lacks the emotive, devotional and ecstatic attitude which is typical of the mystic. Finally, because of an analogous reason, namely because of a possible reference to a merely moral fulfillment within the human condition, I have avoided a third term, namely the "Perfect Man," although I have used it myself on other occasions. On the basis of the above-mentioned relationship between the Taoist designations, I have employed the term "real man" or "realized man" to translate *cheng-jen*. A higher dimension, that of the "transcendent man" (*shen-jen*) must likewise be referred to the "real man," despite the difference existing between the "real man" and the "transcendent man," which Guenon has well documented (*The Great Triad*, Paris, 1946, ch. 18). If the term was not too technical, one could properly speak of "follower" in an initiatory sense, rather than of Saint, Philosopher, Mystic or Wise Man, since, as far as his ontological status is concerned, this is what a *cheng-jen* is. Besides, this is helpful in not losing sight of a certain magical quality which is present in this type of person. The "Men of *Tao*" (*tao-che*) were also called, in the beginning of the Christian era; *fang-shi*, a term which alludes to this magical quality. It is a common opinion that possession of *Tao* bestows a magical force; thus the masters are called *te-jen*, namely "Men of *te*" (as in power). However, the term "initiate" is too specific, therefore I have preferred to render *sheng-jen* with "real man."

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"Real man" is one who reproduces in himself the metaphysical law of *Tao*. This kind of man, in order to be, chooses not to be. By denying himself, he asserts himself; by disappearing, he remains at the center; by being empty, he is full; by hiding, he shines forward; by lowering himself, he stands out. All this happens in an impersonal and non-sentimental way, which is very different from the spirit informing an analogous ethics found outside Taoist China, e.g., in the Christian religion. The fundamental theme is also expressed by the technical expression "preserving the One" (*chen-yi*) or "preserving the Essence" (*tsing*). Man becomes lost because he misplaces the original power outside of himself, thus concretizing

the Ego, super-saturating it, identifying with or exciting "life," feeding the attachment to that portion of life which he has "stolen" and to which now he desperately clings. The path of perfection, or integration, consists in just the opposite; to de-saturate, to let go, to become naked, more simple, not acting, to leave the radius and to go back to the source. Just like in the Tao, in man too there is a continuous, free flow of life which promotes the essential detachment, transcendence, and permanence in what is immaterial and elusive. This flow dissolves the existential entanglement into a superior spontaneity and into a calm self-control. In the human world, this is the "higher virtue" opposed to the "lower virtue," which consists in acting and in striving with the mere aid of the limited human strength and of the illusory center constituted by the individual Ego, while being cut off from the Way.

Therefore, it becomes evident how absurd it is to label Lao-tzu's doctrine as quietist. It is a total blunder on the part of a Chinese scholar to say, like many Europeans do, that the "non-acting" which is required to reach the "conformity of *Tao*" is the "weakness manifested by non-desiring, by not knowing, by being satisfied with little, by humility, and so on." (P. Siao Shi Tu's translation of the *Tao-Te-Ching*, Bari, Italy, 1947, p. 20)

If anything, this is not an example of quietism but of the more purified and subtler doctrine of the "superman." Misunderstandings of this kind find disgraceful expressions in the terms in which several passages of the *Tao-Te-Ching* have been rendered, since it is inferred from them a very mediocre wisdom applied to the social and political realms. Due to the multiple meanings found in a language based on ideograms, anyone can find in similar passages a meaning which reflects one's spiritual mediocrity, but it must be remembered that the essential meaning is almost always expressed in inner and spiritual terms. The Taoist norms are meant to regulate the deepest and transcendent inner life, and not the external, social conduct. The ethics of Lao-tzu is substantially an initiatory ethics.

As far as the Taoist notion of "non acting" (*wu wei*) is concerned, its positive counterpart is "acting without acting" (*wei-wu-wei*). As I have said, *wu wei* only means non-action on the part of the peripheral Ego and the exclusion of "doing" in a direct and material sense as well as of the employment of the exteriorized power. This *wu wei* is the condition for the manifestation of a superior kind of action, which is *wei-wu-wei* precisely. *Wei-wu-wei* comes into play as "Heaven's" action, in its characteristic of *te*, which is the invisible spiritual power which brings everything to fulfillment, irresistibly but also "naturally." Through paradoxical formulations, Lao-tzu repeatedly emphasizes this concept: detachment, abandonment, not-wanting, not acting, are practiced in order to free real action, which is identical to the Way. Chuang-tzu said: "The Human and the Heavenly are one and the same.... That man can not have Heaven is owing to the limitation of his own nature."[5] "Being thus in its nature; unseen it causes harmony; unmoving it transforms; unmoved it perfects."[6]

In this context we can observe the evident absurdity, which so many translators or commentators are guilty of, to see in Taoist precepts relative to the individual and to society some kind of "return to nature," yielding the promise of natural goodness and spontaneity, almost as if Lao-tzu was a Rousseau twenty-three centuries before his time, writing the apology of the "good savage" and the corresponding

indictment of the "corrupting influence of society," typical of the European eighteenth century. It is true that in Taoism, the denial of "culture" (the external knowledge; rationalism; the artificial social system; the small-minded, busy-bodied political wisdom; the zeal to "enlighten the people"; and everything else, including even the study of books written on the *Tao*, which Chuang-tzu called "the Ancients' excrements") is even more radical than in other ideologies similar to that of Rousseau. However, the counterpart to "culture" in this context is something that has nothing to do with nature and with spontaneity, as they have been conceived in the West.

Just as in some Far Eastern texts, the term "natural" very often is synonymous of "heavenly," likewise "nature" was conceived as the Way itself, in its sensible form, namely the elusive, incorporeal, heavenly order in act: "What Heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature,"[7]

Thus, the spontaneity being mentioned, which operates everything as long as one does not act and does not interfere with it, is the transcendental spontaneity of Heaven's Way. The Taoist "original spontaneity" (*p'uo*) is not a trite, primitivist and almost animal-like innocence, but is the state that was hinted about in other traditions through the myth of the golden age or other myths concerning the origins. This state was characterized by the naturality of the supernatural and by the supernaturality of the natural. It should be noted that in both Lao-tzu and in older orthodox texts, up to the one attributed to the legendary Fo-hi (who reigned from 3468 B.C. onward), mention is made of an even older age, the way of which should be revived. (Confucius allegedly said about Lao-tzu; "This man pretends to practice the wisdom of the primordial age.") According to the Taoist saying: "It is necessary that the heavenly element predominate in order for the action to be conformed to the original perfection," the heavenly element is a synonym of the natural element, and it is set against the human element. Therefore a Westerner must realize that what he may be inclined to see as "naturalism," is rather a *Weltanschauung* proper to a humanity which was somehow still connected to the origins, or to "super-nature" in a direct and existential fashion, and not through theories, revelations or religions strictly speaking (*religio* from *religare*, namely to reconnect what was already separated), as it was the case in later stages or cycles of civilization.

This is the key to understand the true nature of Far Eastern spirituality, as well as its specific expressions such as the artistic ones (e.g., painting, in which "nature" is portrayed in an evanescent way, hinting to an ethereal, metaphysical "emptiness"). This is also the key to explain the absence, in that ancient spirituality and in what has been preserved of it, of the ascetical element, strictly speaking, namely of effort, mortification and violent overcoming. Finally, it is the key to understand the above-mentioned and often misunderstood aspects of the *Tao-Te-Ching* concerning non-action.

In reference to the "real man," not-acting characterizes he who escapes the interplay of actions and ensuing reactions, in order to act instead on the invisible and pre-formal plane of those causes and processes which are about to come into being. In relation to this, one finds in the *Tao-Te-Ching* the fundamental idea present in the *I-Ching*, considered as a book of "oracles," namely the idea of preventing the occurrence of events and of situations, and of acting instead on what is still in the process of becoming, on the basis of the knowledge of the "images"

of what takes place both in heaven and on earth. The tradition of the *I-Ching* had already defined the type of the one who, by the employment of this knowledge, is capable of preventing, controlling and directing the interplay of actions and reactions of the *yin* and *yang* in the world of forms and of beings, beyond the immobile and impersonal principle, of which he embodies the nature. Therefore, this aspect of Taoist "not-acting" may be characterized as the choice of not putting oneself on the same plane of the forces or things which one is trying to control. By analogy, a comparison with Japanese wrestling has rightly been suggested, in which "one should never oppose strength with strength; instead, one should throw down the opponent by turning his own strength against him (C. Puini)." The "real man" *does not act* (he gives in, he withdraws, he bends) in order to gain the initiative in what constitutes true action. In reference to this, Lao-tzu talked about winning without fighting, about tying without using knots, about drawing things to oneself without calling out for them or moving in their direction. In a more specific way, a reference can be made to magic, when *wu-wei* is compared to the imperceptible action on what is still "weak" or "soft," in order to prevent further developments, arrest them and lead them in a chosen direction, which appears to be natural to profane eyes. In this sense, in the *Tao-Te-Ching*, it is said that the weak prevails on the strong, what is small over what is bigger, what is soft before what is hard. The simile of water is employed, which takes on various forms, but which can erode what is hard and rigid.

Leaving aside the doctrine of *wu-wei*, there are two possible ways in which the *sheng-jen* can appear. The first way is as an "obscure initiate." Sse Ma Chien relates: "Lao-tzu's school's main concern was to remain inconspicuous and not make a name for itself by becoming famous." According to another saying: "A true Sage does not leave tracks." The *sheng-jen* can externally be identified to the common man, even to the contemptible man, appearing to lack knowledge, ability, practical sense, culture or ambitions, as one who is transported by the worldly stream, avoiding to stand up, to be conspicuous. This happens because of some kind of reflection, in his empirical humanity and in his behavior, of his keeping to himself, without externalizing anything. This impenetrable type of initiate may seem, and to a certain extent it truly is, very Far Eastern; however, it is still found in other traditions, such as Mahayana Buddhism, Islam and, in a later period, in the Western Hermetic tradition and in Rosicrucianism. In Lao-tzu the description of the "real man" in such a cryptic form includes a vein of antinomism, namely of contempt for current values and norms, of the so-called "little virtue" and of what is related to the regulated social life. In Sufism mention is made of the *malamatiyah*, the "blameworthy ones," who enjoy a higher, yet unknown dignity. In a Tibetan legend, Naropa cannot find his master Tilopa, because every time he encounters him he cannot recognize him as the person doing something which he, Naropa, considers reproachable. In Islam one finds the type of the *majadhib*, who are initiates who have operated a split, whereby their transcendental development has no consequences for their inferior and human dimension, which is abandoned to itself.

In the Tao-Te-Ching there are suggestive characterizations of this type of person, which are expressed in a well-known and paradoxical style. Such a one cannot be treated familiarly or distantly; he is beyond all consideration of nobility or meanness

(ch 56). Men resort to him and find rest, peace and the feeling of ease (ch. 35). He is straight among the crooked; full among the empty; new among the worn out (ch. 22). He wears a poor garb of hair cloth, while he carries his signet of jade in his bosom (ch. 70). He is like water, without form, elusive. Wishing to be above men, he puts himself beneath them with his words, and wishing to be before men he places his person behind them. Though he is an elusive being, if he chooses to act, his action reaches the intended goal despite any resistance encountered, precisely because he belongs to another plane. One can even find here the magical trait of physical invulnerability, which is almost a chrism, and a tangible and symbolic sign of his transcendent detachment, which creates a different ontological status (ch. 50). This is what Chuang-tzu had to say on the matter: "He has the form of a man, and therefore he is a man. Being without the passions and desires of men, their approving and disapproving are not to be found in him. How insignificant and small is the body by which he belongs to humanity! How grand and great is he in the unique perfection of his Heavenly nature!"[8] On the contrary, the second way in which the Taoist *sheng-jen* can appear, is in situations in which a given structure of society and of civilization facilitates the correspondence of the inner and secret quality with an external authority and dignity, in the exercise of the visible functions proper of a leader, an ordering figure and a sovereign. In this case, the figure of the *cheng-jen* becomes confused with *Wang Ti*, the "Son of Heaven," found in the Chinese Dynasties.

There is a second possibility. In the *Tao-Te-Ching* the references to the latter type of "real man" are not less numerous than those referring to the former type. This leads us to consider the third aspect of Taoist teachings, namely the application of the *Tao*'s metaphysics to the political realm.

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Lao-tzu's doctrine is intrinsically not "mystical" at all, and this is especially true if one considers his constantly using the Way in reference to him who has the task of ordering society and of being the center or the pole of the worldly forces. In Lao-tzu, this regent figure is never set against the figure representative of an escapist and abstract spirituality. Even in this instance Lao-tzu remains strictly within the parameters of the primordial Chinese tradition, which was a tradition of unity, not only on a purely metaphysical plane, but on the political plane as well. This tradition ignored the division of the two powers (spiritual and political authority), and, beginning with *I-Ching* and with its commentators, it associated the teachings of the transcendent wisdom to the figures of emperors and princes (Fo-hi, the "Yellow Emperor," Wen-Wang, and so on), and not to a separated priestly or "philosophical" class. The sovereigns were the custodians of doctrine. The Chinese were inclined to believe that leadership and the function of *regere* according to "Heaven's mandate," were the natural and eminent prerogatives of he who possessed knowledge and who played the role of a "royal man" or of a "transcendent man." In this context, the Oriental notion of the so-called Great Triad (Heaven, Earth and Man) acquires a fundamental meaning. Man, conceived as the mediator between Heaven and Earth, is essentially man as sovereign, and the sovereign as a "real man." This teaching,

which is also shared by Confucianism (see *Chung Yung*, ch. 22) is expressed in identical terms in the *Tao-Te-Ching* (ch. 25). The eminent function of the sovereign is to keep the communication line between Heaven and Earth open.

The essence of Taoist ethics and politics is the imitation of the Principle, which includes not-acting as well. Up to 1912, when the ancient regime collapsed, the expression *wu-wei* (not-acting) was written on the Chinese imperial throne. It is necessary to emphasize that, in this instance as well, the misunderstanding incurred by the majority of Lao-tzu's translators and commentators, was not inferior to that which they demonstrated when they talked about Taoist "pietism" and "passivity" as an individual ideal. The precept of excluding from government the exercise of strength and of coercion and of not intervening with a heavy hand in the delicate and complex mechanism of social forces; the idea that overdoing, over-organizing, rationalizing, legislating and imposing precepts regulating "social relationships" and virtue, eventually lead to the opposite effects which are desired; the principle according to which everything must organize itself, and that only natural developments and the maturation of effects from given causes must be propitiated, so that the political *optimum* must be seen where the "ten thousand beings" and "everything under the sun" are almost unaware of being ruled and directed; all this, in the *Tao-Te-Ching*, does not bear any resemblance to political absenteeism or to an utopian society which evokes Rousseau and the denial of authority or higher power, and thus, the very idea of the State. This misinterpretation on the part of modern Europeans is almost inevitable, since they no longer have a sense of the political context or the fundamental values proper to primordial and traditional regimes. To have understood the true meaning of Taoist metaphysics and of the way of being of "real men," is to realize that what is at stake is something radically different. First of all, the idea of the State is eminently upheld since, as I have already said, the State or the empire is even conceived as the earthly image of the Way, and almost as its emanation. The attribute "Olympian" well characterizes the political regime that conforms to the *Tao*, provided that it is taken in the right sense and the norm followed by the ruler coincides with the norm dictated by personal ethics. This norm consists in detachment, not-acting as an individual in order to exercise an action which despite being subtle, invisible and immaterial is not any less real, but on the contrary, more efficient than the action in which strength, any "activist" intervention and coercion are employed. The ruler must represent the "unwobbling pivot" (as per in Confucius' own view). Just as the Great Principle, he is absent, but because of that he is supremely and impersonally present. He exercises "Heaven's action" by acting only in virtue of his presence, of his being there as a "real man," of his transcendence.

This is the direct application of the doctrine of the Great Triad, in which man is conceived as a third power between Heaven and earth, in a context which may appear unusual only if one loses sight of the convergence, in this tradition, of the political and the sacred functions. A similar idea was also found in the West, (though limited to the sacred domain), and specifically in the function of the pontiff, according to the etymology of the word ("maker of bridges"): pontiffs were those beings who were conceived as mediators, and as ways employed to spread a higher influence in the human world or even as impersonal centers of such an

influence (in Taoist terms, of *te*). The idea of "active immobility" was also known in Aristotelian philosophy, as well as in Oriental traditions (it is reflected, for instance, in Hindu deities of a *Purushic* type). Taoism merely refers this order of ideas to the *cheng-jen* as the sovereign.

Thus, what is essential in the notion of *regere*, are not specific material actions, or "doing," or human cares and concerns, but to possess and to nourish *te*, Virtue. This is accomplished by becoming united with the Principle; by destroying every particularism and irrational impulse within one's self; and by conforming one's nature to the nature of the "center." Then the sovereign will radiate an influence which resolves tensions, imperceptibly and invisibly moderates and rearranges the interplay of forces in the general equilibrium, wins without fighting, bends without using violence, rectifies and propitiates a climate in which everything can develop in a "natural" way, conforming to the Way in such a degree as to "resemble the primordial state."

Two conditions are necessary for the right function of this influence. The first, at a higher level, is precisely the sovereign's not-acting and impersonal impassability. He must be detached from every human feeling, and from any mania of *grandeur*. He must remain neutral before both good and evil, just as the *Tao* is, from a metaphysical point of view. In fact, any departure from such a neutrality or centrality, would paralyze Virtue and produce chaos around him as an immediate repercussion. The second condition, at a lower level, is that the "ten thousand beings," namely the people, must retain the "primordial simplicity." In other words, they should not wish to be what they are not and they should remain faithful to their own nature. Also, they should implement, each one at his/her own level, and at the best of his/her abilities, the Taoist ethic which shuns extroversion, individualism, frantic pursuit of unnatural goals, greed, lack of equilibrium and excess. When these conditions are met, "Heaven's action" will be felt in a positive way, through the previously described atmosphere, in which positive dispositions will be inclined to develop freely and naturally. This action will also be felt in a negative way by leading back again to the right order those forces which tend to avoid, through the interplay of actions and ensuing reactions, the convergence of paths and of destinies, as well as the law of the conversion of the opposites, whenever these forces reach their limit. Acting without acting in the context of an Olympian and supernatural view of royalty is the function of the Taoist ruler, as it is highlighted in the *Tao-Te-Ching* and evidentiated in two other teachers, Lieh-tzu and Chuang-tzu.

It must be admitted that of the two conditions, the latter is utopian only when it is referring to the orientation of contemporary mankind. The Western world knew, even shortly after the Middle Ages, the faithfulness of large sectors of society to their own state in life and to their own nature. This was the basis of the stability of the *ancien regime*. In Europe there were traces of "Olympian royalty" wherever the temporal power did not dissociate itself from spiritual authority and wherever the monarchies of divine right enjoyed an intrinsic prestige, a symbolic character and a mysticism of their own. However, China itself, during the first centuries of Taoism, was far from reflecting the social milieu envisioned by that political principle of not-acting which was reaffirmed in Lao-tzu's doctrine. Thus, Confucianism followed yet another path, namely that of a social and human "corrective surgery"

which was based more on normative principles than on the original spontaneity envisioned by Taoism. The so-called School of Law of Han Fei-tzu demonstrated a healthy realism by combining the two needs, and by interpreting the Taoist ideas in the following fashion: what is needed first are drastic measures aimed at punishing any transgression and any excess, in order to bring back the individuals and the masses to the natural state; only then the political principle of not-acting should be applied in order to produce natural and free developments which are supported by a supernatural influence. On the contrary, in Lao-tzu, the principles of metaphysically oriented political views, of Olympian sovereignty and of an invisible and ordained from above action, know no compromise or attenuation, since they strictly adhere to the pure doctrine of the origins. This is true even when the stages of the descent and the involution of the political principle are known and described in detail. This involution leads eventually to a situation where the ruler is only feared, and, in the last stage, despised and hated.

What has been said so far leads to some final considerations on the fourth and last aspect of the doctrine of *Tao*, concerning the initiatory notion of immortality.

Among sinologists, the current opinion is that after the time of Lao-tzu, Lieh-tzu and Chuang-tzu, Taoism became corrupted and degenerated. Having ceased to be "philosophical and mystical," it was transformed into a religion which absorbed the most primitive and spurious popular beliefs on the one hand and on the other, it generated a body of doctrines and superstitious practices associated with alchemy and magic, based on a quest for "physical immortality" and thaumaturgical powers.

This is only partially true. Having ascertained that the essential nucleus of the doctrine of the origins did not have a "philosophical and mystical" character but rather a metaphysical character (which is not quite the same thing), it is certainly possible to notice in the history of Taoism, the same process of degeneration undergone by Buddhism, which in the beginning, (as a doctrine of the awakening and enlightening), had an exclusively initiatory character. For both Taoism and Buddhism, this was the fatal consequence of spreading geographically and growing in popularity. As early as the first centuries of this era, Taoism was transformed into a religion which attracted the popular masses, reaching its *apogee* between the fourth and sixth centuries A.D. under six Dynasties. It even gave rise to a political movement; the revolt of the so-called "Yellow Turbans" overturned the rule of the Han dynasty during the second half of the II century A.D. In such a popular religion, the abstract metaphysical principles and stages of inner experience of the original doctrine were transformed into a number of deities, spirits and entities which increasingly populated a fantastic and baroque pantheon, analogous to that of Mahayana Buddhism. Like Buddha, Lao-tzu was deified. The constant forms found in it, typical of mere religion, became prevalent. These forms consist in turning to the gods in order to receive salvation; in the need of an external spiritual help; in faith; in devotion; and in a cult endowed with collective as well as individual rituals and ceremonies. All of this can be characterized as a regression, in which Taoism radically departed from the spirit of the early days.

After Taoism became a popular religion and an exoteric system, and after it partially mingled with Buddhism, it faced a rapid decline and it survived only as a

cult practiced by monks or as the practice of wizards. Eventually it became contemptible in the eyes of the Chinese intellectual elites.

It is a different story when it comes to what has been mistakenly considered a body of superstitious and magical techniques, leading to the achievement of "physical immortality." This is not a degeneration but rather the operative and esoteric dimension of Taoism. In this dimension a doctrine took a specific form, and this doctrine, in its essence, not only conformed to tradition, but is the basis of everything which is considered initiation, even outside the East. The misunderstanding arose due to the fact the majority of the people learned about these aspects of Taoism only when they became degenerated and when they were appropriated by coteries and by sects which could not expound their true meaning. Eventually the doctrines themselves were attributed the problematic and distorted characteristics found in later developments. However, even some sinologists had to acknowledge that as early as in the writings of the Taoist founding figures, there are traces of the initiatory doctrine of immortality, and that this doctrine is not, as it is claimed by many scholars, a more recent and spurious development, based on distorted and fanciful interpretations of the *Tao-Te-Ching* and other scriptures. It is true that in such ancient texts one can only find cryptic hints to this doctrine; but, as I have already remarked, in Lao-tzu and in other figures one should not merely see isolated individuals expounding personal insights, but rather the representatives of schools of thought and initiatory chains which preserved the integral doctrine *ab antiquo*. It is necessary to refer to the latter, when some Taoist traditions mention the "real immortals who have achieved the *Tao*," and who transmit only among themselves, orally, the secret teaching concerning initiatory practices, solemnly swearing never to divulge them to others.

Having said that, I wish to give a brief overview of this issue, even though one finds valid reference to it, not so much in the *Tao-Te-Ching*, but rather in the tradition to which this text belongs, and which was popularized through various distortions.

In order to make sense of the doctrine of immortality, which is shared by Taoism and by other Eastern and Western initiatory schools, it will be useful to compare it with the religious views expressed by Christianity as a way of example. According to Christianity every soul is immortal; immortality is the soul's substance and it is taken for granted. The issue, in Christianity, is not whether the soul survives death, but only the way in which it will survive, namely whether it will obtain bliss in Heaven or suffer the eternal punishments of hell. Thus, the believer's main concern is not to escape death, but to avoid the fate of hell and obtain the rewards of Heaven for his immortal soul. This capsules the Christian conception of "salvation" (*salus*).

The initiatory doctrine views the matter in quite a different way: the problem is not *how* the soul survives, but *whether* it survives. The real alternative is between survival and non-survival, since survival and immortality are not taken for granted, but are seen as a simple and unusual outcome. According to Taoism, almost everybody is inscribed in the Book of Death. In some exceptional cases the Ruler of Destiny cancels a person's name from this book and inscribes it instead in the Book of Life, which contains the names of the Immortals. It would be easy to indicate the

correspondences of this anti-democratic view of immortality with other traditions which express it in the inner content of their own myths. It suffices to mention the idea found in ancient Hellas of the double fate incurred by the "heroes" who are destined to attain the almost Olympian seats of the immortal gods, and by the *oi polloi*. But in esoteric Taoism, besides the doctrine, there is a body of techniques which has to be applied in order to obtain the privilege of immortality, by inducing a change of state, namely the previously mentioned "transformation."

A second difference between initiatory doctrine and religious exotericism is that while according to the latter the soul enjoys immortality upon becoming detached from the body, Taoism upholds the seemingly bizarre idea that immortality should be "constructed" *in* the body and through the transformation *of* the body. This idea, which is also found in other initiatory and mystery teachings, finds a favorable context in the metaphysics of the Far East. This metaphysics, beginning with the comments found in the *I-Ching*, has ignored the dualism of body and soul, of spirit and matter. In this context, birth has been conceived as the passage of a being from the invisible and formless state to the visible and formal state. Corporeality has likewise been conceived merely as existence in a form, or as an exteriorized existence. The latter has been explained as the coalescence or bonding, of the spiritual element. In order to explain the ensuing change of state, some symbolic and corporeal images have been provided, such as that of the fixing of spirits or "breath" or the coagulation of the subtle and ethereal substance (*khi*). In its deepest meaning, the fixing consists in the identification of being with a formal existence. The formal, exteriorized existence is then caught up in the current of transformations, and thus becomes subject to the crises proper to every change of state, as well as to the process of exiting a state (dying) in order to enter a new one (being born). It seems natural that this crisis can have destructive consequences for those who have become fixed in a form, that is, in the bodily state. Having failed to preserve and having "dissipated" the sense of the One or the Essence, such a being cannot survive, but will repeatedly "enter" and "exit" the life stream, though nothing permanent will survive. According to Taoism, his being, as an individual, will disintegrate. At the moment of death, since the metaphysical principle is clouded, the various forces (portrayed as many entities residing in the body) kept together in the bodily organism, and in general, in the human personality, become free and cease to supply a foundation to consciousness and to the sense of continuity of the individual Ego.

This is an extremely realistic, and the digressive background on which the esoteric doctrine of immortality is articulated. According to this doctrine, immortality must be elaborated in the body while one is alive (dying before one's time is thus considered a disgraceful circumstance), on the basis of an ontological and existential transformation taking place in the condition of the formal existence. Immortality does not mean physically escaping death, but rather avoiding altogether the crisis which, in the case of ordinary people, is connected to the transformation or change of state (*hua*). Thus, the legendary sovereign Yan-Shang was said to be "the only one who was not transformed in the course of the universal transformation."

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It is not necessary at this point to focus on details. The techniques employed in Taoism aim at limiting the extroverted tendency to identify with and to become dissipated into the essence of life (in the *Tao-Te-Ching*, there are several passages susceptible to take on such an operative meaning) and also to generate and to nourish what is called "the immortal embryo"[7] or the "mysterious embryo," by dissolving the coagulation of formal existence. This could be expressed with the dualistic Western conceptual framework, by saying that the "body" is transformed into "spirit," or that "body" and "spirit" become one thing in virtue of the reintegration into the Principle. Maspero, a celebrated sinologist, quoted the following passage taken from the *Yun-ki ts'i-ts'ien*:

> *The body becomes penetrated by the Tao and thus becomes one with the spirit; he whose body and spirit are united and form one thing, is called "divine man" (shen-jen). In that instance, the nature of spirit is empty and sublimated, and its substance is not destroyed during the transformation. Since the body is similar in all things to life, there is no longer any life or death... to go on living or to die is up to the individual; one comes and goes without interval... The material body, having been transformed, is identical to the spirit; the melted spirit becomes subtle and forms one thing with the Tao.*[8]

"Melted" and "to melt" are technical terms of operative Taoism, which are synonymous of "de-coagulate," in the same sense in which a metal goes from the solid state to a fluid one (fusion), when fire is employed as an agent.

The act of "freezing" in a given form, is overcome; only then, death is turned into a mere change of state, which does not affect the essence. Everything becomes alive in the current of the primordial vital fluid (*khi*) with which contact has been re-established. This process is not conceived in abstract and spiritual terms. During the fusion, the many powers of the psycho-physical connection, which otherwise would become dissociated and freed, are integrated and resumed in the essential One. Hence the specifically Taoist notion, which is found in the various "biographies of real men who have embodied the *Tao*," of the fusion or solution of the corpse (*she kiai*). The Taoist initiate, when dying, does not leave a body behind. In his tomb, there is only to be found a symbolic sword or scepter. This is the mark of the "Men of *Taò*," who are superior beings, and who are said to be "Immortals."

They are immortal not in the sense that they will live forever as human beings, but in the sense that they only die in appearance, because they have been integrated without any residue in the central principle which is superior to both life and death. Therefore, the true meaning of the Taoist notion of "bodily immortality" is that the form which has been integrated in the pre-formal, is now transferred into the primordial and not-exteriorized condition, which is not subject to the flux of modifications and changes. By analogy, it can be said that an "immortal body" has been generated. In this context, it is possible to talk about "pure forms," in an analogous sense to that which was given by scholasticism to this term. Laymen or semi-initiates, who could not understand the teaching in these metaphysical and esoteric terms, assumed it in a coarse and superstitious way, and attempted to develop techniques that could eliminate old age and illness, as well as indefinitely prolong

physical existence. Since the doctrine of immortality degenerated into superstitious forms, it generated gross misunderstandings. However, it should not be excluded that certain extra-normal possibilities may trickle down from spiritual realization into human existence, and that these possibilities may have been cultivated by some schools.

Westerners are also likely to misunderstand the terminology characterizing this doctrine, since the expression which is employed most of the times is *ch'ang-sheng*, which literally means "long life," even though this expression refers to an endless and continuous life, and by extension, to immortality (I mentioned earlier that "old age" in China had a similar meaning, hence the attribute "old;" which was bestowed on various deities and on Lao-tzu himself). It is easy, therefore, to be misled into thinking that the Teachers exclusively focused on longevity and on the preparation of an elixir of long life. An even worse distortion is found in religious Taoism, in which the esoteric doctrine of immortality generated the myth according to which the believer, after death, reclaims his body, leaves the sepulchre, and goes on to dwell in the immortals' heavenly abodes. This is the exact correspondence of the unsophisticated exoteric Christian doctrine of the "resurrection of the flesh," which was developed in the same way, namely through an obtuse interpretation of some teachings of the Mystery Religions, which were borrowed by early Christianity and combined with the Pauline notion of "glorious body" or "resurrection body." The "resurrection of the body" is not a grandiose event taking place at the end of times, but rather the already mentioned initiatory "de-coagulation" of the corporeal (endowed-with-form) condition.

A charming Taoist image, describing the one who can undergo any change of state while remaining free and invulnerable, is that of the "flying immortal" (*fei-sien*). Finally, one finds the initiatory and hierarchical distinction between the "earthly immortal" and the "heavenly immortal." This distinction should be attributed to the existence of two types of immunity to changes of state: immunity to the changes proper of the human condition, and immunity to the changes proper of other superior, "heavenly" conditions of being.

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I will not describe here the techniques employed by operative Taoism. Some of these techniques consist of disciplining one's thought; contemplation; yoga-like techniques, based on breathing and on the practice of sex; dietary practices; drugs; forms of practical alchemy; and even a type of physical workout (the so-called *tao-yin*). From an inner perspective, detachment is the main premise, thus, "not to yearn desire," as Lao-tzu himself said, in order to de-coagulate the flux of vital energy. This process is compared to restoring the throne of the One, the legitimate sovereign, who has been deposed by usurpers and by rebellious generals. The technical term "nourishing the spirit" is synonymous of strengthening the One, who sometimes is called the "Great *Yang*." The cold and impersonal magical quality which must be achieved is the opposite of mystical enthusiasm. What is required, instead of moralism, is a balanced neutrality toward both good and evil. This is called "cooling one's heart," or "emptying one's heart." One Taoist text speaks of "the heart, as cold

ashes, without emotions or inclinations;" similar expressions are also found in Chuang-tzu. Once this state is achieved, one will perceive the *Tao* and suddenly become aware of being within the Way. Everything else is only a consequence and a consolidation. In Chuang-tzu (VI, 8) seven stages are mentioned in reference to Master Pu-Liang I: 1) he banished from his mind all worldly matters; 2) he banished from his mind all thoughts of men and things; 3) he was able to count his life as foreign to himself; 4) this accomplished, his mind was afterwards clear as the morning; 5) after this he was able to see his own individuality; 6) he was then able to banish all thought of Past and Present; 7) freed from this, he was able to penetrate to the truth that there is no difference between life and death. Once the *Tao* is perceived, the distinction between past and present becomes meaningless. Finally "the mystery unfolds" and a state occurs in which "one is not alive nor dead," to indicate the superiority toward life and death proper to the "transformed" being, who is united to the fixed Principle "from which all mutations derive."

This is the realization which will gradually de-coagulate or "melt" the form, from the subtle to the gross, until the corpse will dissolve (*che-kiai*). In the *Tao-Te-Ching* (ch. 10) there is an explicit reference to this, almost as if to give away a secret teaching, through the initiatory amalgamation of soul and body into the "mysterious Quality." When it comes to written documents, the best available on this subject are gathered in a work of Henri Maspero's (*"Les procedes de nourrir l'esprit vital dans la religione taoste ancienne," Journal Asiatique* (219), 1973). Although these techniques are mentioned as early as 400-300 B.C., it is difficult to separate the genuine nucleus of these ideas from what is the product of misunderstandings, misleading interpretations, deviations or degenerations of the doctrine. After all, the Masters explicitly warned that the real key to operative Taoism is not given in writing but is transmitted orally.

Beginning with the Han period, the esoteric Taoism of the "Men of *Tao*" (*tao-che*) became distinct from religious Taoism (*tao-chiao*) and it continued as a secret tradition up to our days. Matgioi (a military man whose Western name was A. de Poupourville), one of the very few Europeans to come in direct contact with the representatives of this tradition, has referred to the existence, among Taoist initiatory groups, of a hierarchy consisting of three degrees. The first degree is that of *tong-sang*, in which a person is initiated to the teachings formulated in the texts. The second degree is that of *phu-tuy*, which includes a deepening of the doctrine, not only on an intellectual level: one must be able to discover the higher and secret meanings contained in the texts by himself, since at this level a major rule would be broken if knowledge was acquired through the help of somebody else. One is admitted to the third and last degree (*phap*) only after undergoing a period of isolation and silence and after this period one is given the full initiation. *Phap* corresponds to the first of the two types of initiate previously described. He is an obscure and powerful being, venerated and ignored, detached from everything and everybody. He is attributed the power of mastering his body and of having full knowledge of the hidden secrets and forces of nature. He corresponds to the figure of the "Immortal" of ancient Taoism (Matjoi, *La voie rationelle*. Paris: 1907, ch. VII).

In Chinese civilization, the other exterior and degenerated forms of religious or semi-shamanic Taoism became discredited and lost ground to the second orthodox

teaching, namely Confucianism. Much of Lao-tzu's version of Taoism, also considered as a general conduct of life and as an inner discipline, has been preserved, mixed with Buddhism, in other schools such as Zen (see *Zen: The Religion of the Samurai* by Julius Evola, Holmes Publishing Group, 1994). Zen is still active in Japan and has recently drawn the attention of several Western groups. In Zen, the elimination of the Ego and its tensions ("emptiness") and anti-intellectualism constitute a path leading to a higher spontaneity and perfection, which are not confined to an ascetical or mystical world, but which are rather applied to all aspects of life. In Zen, an enlightenment, usually conceived as a sudden and abrupt change of level, induces a change of polarity, and brings the Ego back to its true center by uniting it with the Great Principle.

NOTES

[1] *The Texts of Taoism*. Translated by James Legge. (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), Ch. 38.
[2] Ibid., *Tao-Te-Ching*, ch.5.
[3] *Chuang-tzu*, XII, 3.
[4] Ibid., *Tao-Te-Ching*, ch. 25.
[5] Ibid., *Chuang-tzu*, XX, 7.
[6] *Chung Yung*. Translated by Ezra Pound. (NY: New Directions, 1951), XXVI, 6.
[7] Ibid., I, 1.
[8] *Texts of Taoism*, *Chuang-tzu*, V, 5.
[9] Henri Maspero, (*Le Taoisme*: Paris, 1950), 40.

The Meaning and Context of Zen

Julius Evola

We know the kind of interest Zen has evoked even outside specialized disciplines, since being popularized in the west by D.T. Suzuki through his books Introduction to Zen Buddhism and Essays in Zen Buddhism. This popular interest is due to the paradoxical encounter between East and West. The ailing West perceives that Zen has something “existential” and surrealistic to offer. Zen’s notion of a spiritual realization, free from any faith and any bond, not to mention the mirage of an instantaneous and somehow gratuitous “spiritual breakthrough”, has exercised a fascinating attraction on many Westerners. However, this is true, for the most part, only superficially. There is a considerable difference between the spiritual dimension of the “philosophy of crisis”, which has become popular in the West as a consequence of its materialistic and nihilist development, and the spiritual dimension of Zen, which has been rooted in the spirituality of the Buddhist tradition. Any true encounter between Zen and the West, presupposes, in a Westerner, either an exceptional predisposition, or the capability to operate a metanoia. By metanoia I mean an inner turnabout, affecting not so much one’s intellectual “attitudes”, but rather a dimension which in every time and in every place has been conceived as a deeper reality.

Zen has a secret doctrine and not to be found in scriptures. It was passed on by the Buddha to his disciple Mahakassapa. This secret doctrine was introduced in China around the sixth century C.E. by Bodhidharma. The canon was transmitted in China and Japan through a succession on teachers and “patriarchs”. In Japan it is a living tradition and has many advocates and numerous Zendos (“Halls of Meditation”).

As far as the spirit informing the tradition is concerned, Zen may be considered as a continuation of early Buddhism. Buddhism arose as a vigorous reaction against the theological speculation and the shallow ritualism into which the ancient Hindu priestly caste had degraded after possessing a sacred, lively wisdom since ancient times. Buddha mad tabula rassa of all this: he focused instead on the practical problem of how to overcome what in the popular mind is referred to as “life’s suffering”. According to esoteric teachings, this suffering was considered as the state of caducity, restlessness, “thirst” and the forgetfulness typical of ordinary people. Having followed the path leading to spiritual awakening and to immortality without external aid, Buddha pointed the way to those who felt an attraction to it. It is well known that Buddha is not a name, but an attribute or a title meaning “the awakened One”, “He who has achieved enlightenment”, or “the awakening”. Buddha was silent about the content of his experience, since he wanted to discourage people from assigning to speculation and philosophizing a primacy over action. Therefore, unlike his predecessors, he did not talk about Brahman (the absolute), or about Atman (the transcendental Self), but only employees the term nirvana, at the risk of being misunderstood. Some, in fact, thought, in their lack of understanding, that nirvana was to be identified with the notion of “nothingness”, an ineffable and evanescent transcendence, almost bordering on the limits of the unconscious and of a state of unaware non-being. So, in a further development of Buddhism, what occurred again, mutatis mutandi, was exactly the situation against which Buddha had reacted; Buddhism became a religion, complete with dogmas, rituals, scholasticism and mythology. It eventually became differentiated into two schools: Mahayana and Hinayana. The

former was more grandiose in metaphysics an Mahayana eventually grew complacent with its abstruse symbolism. The teachings of the latter school were more strict and to the point, and yet too concerned about the mere moral discipline which became increasingly monastic. Thus the essential and original nucleus, namely the esoteric doctrine of the enlightenment, was almost lost.

At this crucial time Zen appeared, declaring the uselessness of these so-called methods and proclaiming the doctrine of satori. Satori is a fundamental inner event, a sudden existential breakthrough, corresponding in essence to what I have called the “awakening”. But this formulation was new and original and it constituted a radical change in approach. Nirvana, which had been variously considered as the alleged Nothingness, as extinction, and as the final end result of an effort aimed at obtaining liberation (which according to some may require more than one lifetime), now came to be considered as the normal human condition. By these lights, every person has the nature of Buddha and every person is already liberated, and therefore, situated above and beyond birth and death. It is only necessary to become aware of it, to realize it, to see within one’s nature, according to Zen’s main expression. Satori is like a timeless opening up. On the one hand, satori is something sudden and radically different from all the ordinary human states of consciousness; it is like a catastrophic trauma within ordinary consciousness. On the other hand, satori is what leads one back to what, in a higher sense, should be considered as normal and natural; thus, it is the exact opposite of an ecstasis, or trance. It is the rediscovery and the appropriation of one’s true nature: it is the enlightenment which draws out of ignorance or out of the subconscious the deep reality of what was and will always be, regardless of one’s condition in life. The consequence of satori is a completely new way to look at the world and at life. To those who have experienced it, everything is the same (things, other beings, one’s self, “heaven, the rivers and the vast earth”), and yet everything is fundamentally different. It is as if a new dimension was added to reality, transforming the meaning and value. According to the Zen Masters, the essential characteristic of the new experience is the overcoming of very dualism: of the inner and outer; the I and not I; of finitude and infinity; being and not-being; appearance and reality; “empty” and “full”; substance and accidents. Another characteristic is that any value posed by the finite and confused consciousness of the individual, is no longer discernible. And thus, the liberated and the non-liberated, the enlightened and the non-enlightened, are yet one and same thing. Zen effectively perpetuates the paradoxical equation of Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana-samsara, and the Taoist saying “the return is infinitely far”. It is as if Zen said: liberation should not be looked for in the next world; the very world is the next world; it is liberation and it does not need to be liberated. This is the point of view of satori, of perfect enlightenment, of “transcendent wisdom” (prajnaparamita).

Basically, this consciousness is a shift of the self’s center. In any situation and in any event of ordinary life, including the most trivial ones, the ordinary, dualistic and intellectual sense of one’s self is substituted with a being who no longer perceives an “I” opposed to a “non-I”, and who transcends and overcomes any antithesis. This being eventually comes to enjoy a perfect freedom an incoercibility. He is like the wind, which blows where it wills, and like a naked being which is everything after “letting go” - abandons everything, embracing poverty.

Zen, or at least mainstream Zen, emphasizes the discontinuous, sudden and unpredictable character of satori disclosure. In regard to this, Suzuki was at fault when he took issue with the techniques used in

Hindu schools such as Samkya and Yoga. These techniques were also contemplated in early Buddhist texts. Suzuki employed the simile of water, which in a moment turns into ice. He also used the simile of an alarm, which, as a consequence of some vibration, suddenly goes off. There are no disciplines, techniques or efforts, according to Suzuki, which by themselves may lead one to satori. On the contrary, it is claimed that satori often occurs spontaneously, when one has exhausted all the resources of his being, especially the intellect and logical faculty of understanding. In some cases satori it is said to be facilitated by violent sensations and even by physical pain. Its cause may be the mere perception of an object as well as any event in ordinary life, provided a certain latent predisposition exists in the subject.

Regarding this, some misunderstandings may occur. Suzuki acknowledged that “generally speaking, there are no indications on the inner work preceding satori”. However, he talked about the necessity of first going through “a true baptism of fire”. After all, the very institution of the so-called “Halls of Meditation” (Zendo), where those who strive to obtain a satori submit themselves to a regimen of life which is partially analogous to that of some Catholic religious orders, bespeaks the necessity of a preliminary preparation. This preparation may last for several years. The essence of Zen seems to consist in a maturation process, identical to the one in which one almost reaches a state of an acute existential instability. At that point, the slightest push is sufficient to produce a change of state, a spiritual breakthrough, the opening which leads to the “intuitive vision of one’s nature”. The Masters know the moment in which the mind of the disciple is mature and ready to open up; it is ten that they eventually give the final. Decisive push. This push may sometimes consist of a simple gesture, an exclamation, in something apparently irrelevant, or even illogical and absurd. This suffices to induce the collapse of the false notion of individuality. Thus, satori replaces this notion with the “normal state”, and one assumes the “original face, which one had before creation”. One no longer “chases after echoes” and “shadows”. This under some aspects brings to mind the existential theme of “failure”, or of “being shipwrecked” (das Scheitern, in Kierkegaard and in Jaspers). In fact, as I have mentioned, the opening often takes place when all the resources of one’s being have been exhausted and one has his back against the wall. This can be seen in relation to some practical teachings methods used by Zen. The most frequently employed methods, on an intellectual plane, are the koan and the mondo. The disciple is confronted with a saying or with questions which are paradoxical, absurd and sometimes even grotesque and “surrealistic”. He must labor with his mind, if necessary for years, until he has reached the extreme limit of all his normal faculties of comprehension. Then, if he dares proceed further on that road he may find catastrophe, but if he can turn the situation upside down, he may achieve metanoia. This is the point where satori is usually achieved.

Zen’s norm is that of absolute autonomy; no gods, no cults, no idols. To literally empty oneself of everything, including God. “If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him”, a saying goes. It is necessary to abandon everything, without leaning on anything, and then to proceed forward, with one’s essence, until the crisis point is reached. It is very difficult to say more about satori, or to compare it with various forms of initiatory mystical experience whether Eastern or Western. One is supposed to spend only the training period in Zen monasteries. Once the disciple has achieved satori, he return to the world, choosing a way of life that fits his need. One may think of satori as a form of transcendence which is brought to immanence, as a natural state, in every form of life.

The behavior which proceeds from the newly acquired dimension, which is added to reality as a consequence of satori, may well be summarized by Lao Tzu's expression: "To be the whole in the part". In regard to this, it is important to realize the influence which Zen has exercised on the Far-Eastern way of life. Zen has been called "the samurai's philosophy," and it had also been said that "the way of Zen is identical to the way of archery," or to the "way of the sword". This means that any activity in one's life, may be permeated by Zen and thus be elevated to a higher meaning, to a "wholesomeness" and to an "impersonal activity". This kind of activity is based on a sense of the individual's irrelevance, which nevertheless does not paralyze one's actions, but which rather confers cam and detachment. This detachment, in turn, favors an absolute and "pure" undertaking of life, which in some cases reaches extreme and distinct forms of self-sacrifice and heroism, inconceivable to the majority of Westerners (e.g. the kamikaze in WWII).

Thus, what C.G. Jung claims is simply ridiculous, namely that Psychoanalysis, more than any other Western school of thought, is capable of understanding Zen. According to Jung, satori coincides with the state of wholeness, devoid of complexes or inner splitting, which psychoanalytic treatment claims to achieve whenever the intellect's obstructions and its sense of superiority are removed, and whenever the conscious dimension of the soul is reunited with the unconscious and with "Life". Jung did not realize that the methods and presuppositions of Zen, are exactly the opposite of his own. There is no "subconscious", as a distinct entity, to which the conscious has to be reconnected; Zen speaks of a superconscious vision (enlightenment, bodhi or "awakening"), which actualizes the "original and luminous nature" and which, in so doing, destroys the unconscious. It is possible though, to notice similarities between Jung's view's and Zen', since they both talk about the feeling of one's "totality" and freedom which is manifested in every aspect of life. However, it is important to explain the level at which these views appear to coincide.

Once Zen found its way to the West, there was a tendency to "domesticate" and to moralize it, playing down its potential radical and "antinomian" (namely, antithetical to current norms) implications, and by emphasizing the standard ingredients which are held so dear by "spiritual" people, namely love and service to one's neighbor, even though these ingredients have been purified in an impersonal and non-sentimental form. Generally speaking, there are many doubts on the "practicability" o f Zen, considering that the "doctrine of the awakening" has an initiatory character.

Thus, it will only be able to inspire a minority of people, in contrast to later Buddhist views, which took the form of a religion open to everyone, for the most part a code of mere morality. As the re-establishment of the spirit of early Buddhism, Zen should have strictly been an esoteric doctrine. It has been so as we can see by examining the legend concerning its origins. However, Suzuki himself was inclined to give a different account; he emphasized those aspects of Mahayana which "democratize" Buddhism (after all, the term Mahayana has been interpreted to mean "Great Vehicle", even in the sense that it extends to wider audiences, and not just to a few elect). If one was to fully agree with Suzuki, some perplexities on the nature and on the scope of satori may arise. One should ask whether such an experience merely affects the psychological, moral or mental domain, or whether it affects the ontological domain, as is the case in every authentic initiation. In that event, it can only be the privilege a very restricted number of people.

WHAT IS ZEN?

A small book, entitled *Zen and the Art of Archery*, has recently been published by Rigois, a Turin-based publishing house. This precious little book is very revealing of the spiritual foundation of forms, disciplines and behaviors typical of Far Eastern civilizations, particularly those of Japan. The author, Eugen Herrigel, a German professor who taught philosophy in a Japanese university, resolved to study the traditional spirit of Japan in one of its most characteristic expressions, namely Zen. Zen is a Far Eastern school of metaphysics and of Buddhist initiation. As strange as it may first appear, Herrigel was encouraged to learn the traditional art of archery in order to come as close as possible to an understanding of Zen. Herrigel studied this art tirelessly for five years, under the supervision of a master. Herrigel's book describes how his progress in this traditional art and the gradual penetration of the essence of Zen went hand in hand and mutually conditioned each other, eventually producing a deep inner transformation in the author.

It is not easy to briefly summarize and to popularize the contents of this book. As I have said, Zen is an offshoot of Buddhism. It played and still plays an essential role in the formation of Japanese men, especially of the warrior aristocracy, the *samurai*. Buddhism immediately evokes the notion of *nirvana*, which in turn suggests some kind of evanescent and ascetical state of bliss. This is not the case of Zen. *Nirvana*, according to Zen, is a state of inner freedom; a state which is free of the Ego's passions, anxieties and bonds. This state can be preserved in any kind of activity and in any aspect of everyday life. The state of Zen is a different dimension and encompasses life as a whole; it consists of a different way of going through and experiencing life. The "absence of the ego," promoted by Zen, is not the equivalent of apathy or atony; but rather induces a higher form of spontaneity, self-assurance, freedom and calmness during action. It is like one who, after spasmodically grabbing onto something, eventually lets go and in doing so acquires an even higher sense of tranquillity, a higher form of freedom and of security.

Thus, in the Far East there are traditional arts, which, on the one hand, originate from the freedom induced by Zen; on the other hand these arts are, *per se*, ways to achieve this very freedom through training and practice. As odd as it may seem, there is Zen in the art of drama, in the tea ceremony, in the

arrangement of flowers, in archery, in wrestling (*judo*), in fencing and so on. All of these arts have a ritual dimension. Besides, in virtue of some inscrutable connections, a complete mastery in one of these arts cannot be achieved without the above-mentioned inner enlightenment and transformation of the sense which one has of his/her own self; this mastery eventually becomes a visible sign of such enlightenment.

Thus Herrigel tells his readers how, in the process of learning the art of archery, slowly and gradually, through the technical problems he encountered in the process of mastering this art, as it is still taught in Japan, he eventually achieved the knowledge and the inner clarification he had been seeking. He realized that archery is not a sport but rather a ritual act and an initiation. In order to be able to master this art, it was necessary for him to eliminate his own Ego, to overcome tensions and to achieve a higher spontaneity. When these conditions were met, the relaxation of his muscles effectively and mysteriously corresponded to maximum strength. The individual, the bow and the target became one; the arrow took off by itself and even without aiming it always reached the target. In these terms, the acknowledgment of his achieved mastery in archery was also the acknowledgment of a higher degree of Zen spirituality. Zen, in this sense, was not a theory or a philosophy, but rather an effective experience and a deeper way of being.

In its description of situations such as these, Herrigel's book is valuable not only because it introduces us to the spirit of an exotic civilization, but also because it enables us to see some of our own Western traditions under a new light. It is known how in older times, and in part, until the Middle Ages, some traditions which were jealously preserved, as well as elements of cults, rituals and even mysteries became associated with various arts. In the past, there were "gods" associated to various arts and rituals of initiation into these arts. The initiation into certain professional and artisan guilds, corporations and *collegia*, was paralleled by a spiritual initiation. As an example, because of the symbolism which characterized it, the art of the medieval stone cutters was the basis of the early Masonry, which drew from it the allegories of the *Opus Magnum*.

Therefore, it is likely that the West knew something similar to what has been preserved until recent times in the Far East in disciplines such as the "way of archery," or the "way of swordsmanship," believed to be identical to the "way of Zen."

The West, due to different presuppositions as far as religious traditions are concerned, may not have experienced this dimension with the same intensity. However, it has known it at another level of existence in which all human activities are reduced to either dull work or to mechanization or to aimless activities, or, at worst, to a soulless sport. All this often ends up strengthening, instead of alleviating, the process of the hardening and of the closing up of the physical Self in modern man.

THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI

The figure of the *samurai* (the members of the Japanese noble warrior class), is well known in the West. Recently, Yukio Mishima's suicide, which he committed to call his people back to the ancient traditions and national pride, has rekindled popular interest in the *samurai*. Little is known regarding the *samurai's* inner traditions. This can be partially explained with the fact that the Japanese are particularly reluctant to talk about their spiritual life. They consider being questioned on such matters almost as a sign which is indicative of a lack of discretion and tact. The Japanese are experts in the art of avoiding the topic, and yet they do so with great courtesy. The increasing modernization, and even Americanization of Japan, is a further negative element when it comes to understanding these traditions.

I would like, at this point, to mention a few things concerning the *samurai's* religion and way of life. The most complete and scholarly source on this matter is a text by Kaiten Nukariya, entitled *The Religion of the Samurai*, (London/ Tokyo, 1913). Japan's official religion is Shintoism, a term composed of *shin* (deity) and *do* (way or doctrine). Shintoism thus means, "Doctrine, or way of the Deity." Its basis is faith in the divine origin and mandate of Japan and of its people. Japanese tradition is believed to have originated "from above." This is said to be eminently true in the case of the Japanese imperial dynasty, which assumed a divine character,[1] since it is directly connected with the solar deity, *Amaterasu-o-mikani*. Given these premises, loyalty to Emperor and to nation is believed to be a religious act: country and dynasty have become the concrete reference points of every transcendent act, of every individual *élan* toward what lies beyond mere mortal and finite existence.

The term *matsurigoto* means both government, namely temporal power, and cult, namely the practice of religious affairs. By correspondence, every crime and dishonorable action committed in Japan has taken on the meaning of sacrilege. Thus a crime goes beyond the juridical and social dimensions, and well into the religious dimension.

In Japan, faithfulness and loyalty have not been values restricted to the military and aristocratic elite, but they have rather been extended to include respect for parents; solidarity between relatives or friends; the practice of virtue; respect for the laws; harmony between spouses in the context of a correct

hierarchical relationship between the sexes; productivity in the economic sector; work and study; the task of shaping one's character; the safeguard of blood and race. Everything comes down to "faithfulness," and ultimately, to faithfulness to the imperial family. Within this context, any anti-social, immoral, criminal or deviant behavior does not represent the transgression of an abstract rule, or of a more or less insignificant or conventional social "law;" it rather represents betrayal, disloyalty, or a disgrace comparable to that suffered by a warrior who either deserts or fails in his duty toward his superiors. There are no "guilty persons," but rather "traitors," or *beings without honor*; hence the meaning of the famous oriental expression "to lose face," which is considered an intolerable experience.

This is true as far the general atmosphere of traditional Japan is concerned. I will now examine the doctrine which has specifically been the inner soul of the entire caste of the *samurai*, the noble feudal-warrior aristocracy; I am referring to *Zen-shu*, or more simply, Zen. The formative power of such a doctrine has been universally recognized.

The origins of Zen go back to Buddhism. Buddhism became differentiated into the schools of the so-called "Small Vehicle," (*Hinayana*), and the "Great Vehicle," (*Mahayana*). The former had a more empirical and ascetical character; the latter had a more metaphysical inclination. Zen may be considered as a particular expression of *Mahayana*. It originated in the northern regions of India and later moved first to China and then to Japan, where it took a firm hold from 1190 C.E. onwards. Since then, Zen has not ceased to exercise its influence on the Japanese soul in general and more specifically on the warrior class. Such an influence has grown in intensity ever since the Russian-Japanese conflict. It has grown so much, that up to a few years ago it would have been difficult to find a person of noble origins who had not been exposed to Zen views. It is also well known that ascetical training, closely imbued with Zen views, was considered as the natural preparation for those who wished to become officers in the Imperial Army.

Having mentioned the relationship between Zen and Buddhism, somebody may still be perplexed, since in the West Buddhism is thought to be synonymous with alienation from this life. In the West people also think that the Buddhist *nirvana* is the supreme way to evade or to escape from the world, which is equated by Buddhism with suffering, and to take refuge in some kind of shapeless transcendence. It is not necessary, at this point, to describe in detail the essence of Buddhism. It suffices to say that early Buddhism, setting aside the abstract speculations and the ritualism which the Hindu *Brahmin* caste had become obsessed with, focused simply on the issue of "liberation." The truth, which was known even in the ancient Roman world through the words of Sallust: "*omnia orta occidunt et aucta senescunt*," constitutes the starting point of the original Buddhist doctrine. According to this truth, the world is ruled by caducity and impermanence. However, it is possible to escape from this world and to participate in a higher existence which is found beyond life and death. Buddha

always avoided talk and "philosophizing." He designated this higher existence with the term *nirvana*, which is not a positive description, but rather an apophatic expression. The term *nirvana* implies that the *conditio sine qua non* which is required to reach that particular state, is the destruction of the craving, thirst, desire, or *fever* which is so operative in human "restlessness." The term *vana* encompasses all of these meanings, while the prefix *nir* refers to the absence of this condition. Thus, to say that this condition is absent does not mean that one has vanished into "nothingness." This is a misconception typical of people who are accustomed to identify life with those qualities, which those who *know* and have a higher insight, consider instead to be fever and obsession.

Zen doctrine essentially takes this orientation again and applies it in a proper context. Zen does not promote involvement in speculation, sacred writings, or canonical texts. This explains its laconic and extremely terse style. According to a famous image, every theory is valid only inasmuch as it points to a path which must be followed using one's own strength. Self-discipline, in almost ascetical yet active terms (though not self-mortifying), constitutes the fundamental element of Zen which was found particularly attractive by the *Samurai*. This self-discipline, though, is very subtle and mostly directed inward. In this discipline one can distinguish the following degrees.

First, it is necessary to master external objects, namely the impressions and the stimuli which emanate from them, and to substitute one's passive attitude toward the objects with an active, dynamic attitude. The disciple is encouraged to realize that every time a yearning leads him toward something, he is not in control of the external object, but rather the object is in control of him. "He who loves a liquor, deceives himself in thinking that he is drinking the liquor; the truth is, the liquor is drinking him." Thus, the goal is to become detached, to find within one's self the one Master. The Western ethics of the Stoics was not dissimilar from this. However, what Zen adds to this detached attitude is the *Mahayana* doctrine of "emptiness," according to which all external objects are, from a metaphysical point of view (*sub species aeternitatis*), nothing else but illusory projections. These projections are given an appearance of reality and power by our own cravings.

In the second stage, one has to master the body, and affirm one's authority over the entire physical organism. It has been said: "Imagine your own body as something other than yourselves. If it cries, quiet it right away, as a strict mother does with her own child. If it is capricious, control it as a rider does his own horse, through the bridle. If it is sick, administer medicines to it, just as a doctor does with a patient. If it disobeys you, punish it, as a teacher does with a pupil." This should become a discipline marked by habit and not remain a mere theory. It must become practice. Quite often at this level, the spiritual exercise complements military training. In ancient times there were "competitions of resoluteness," which determined who, among the disciples, knew how to endure for the longest time the worst heat during the summer and the most glacial cold during the winter.

Generally speaking, it is typical of Zen to look upon various "martial arts," including other arts, as some kind of spiritual and even initiatory counterpart. Zen even views the mastery of a given art as some kind of external sign of a corresponding inner realization.

The third stage consists in the control of the passions and emotions and in the achievement of an inner equilibrium. One must realize the irrationality and the futility of all fears, hopes, and excitements, and eventually "bring the heart under control." In regard to this, there is an anecdote about O-yo-mei, the commander in chief of an army who was fighting a decisive struggle against an attempted usurpation. In the course of the military campaign he did not neglect to practice Zen in his own headquarters. When he was told that his troops had been routed, his staff panicked, but O-yo-mei did not get upset, but gave some brief instructions. A little later the news arrived that, in a further development of the battle, victory had been won. O-yo-mei remained as calm as before and did not interrupt his Zen practice. What must be emphasized is that Zen does not promote a stiff insensibility, but rather that it attempts to remove any useless feeling and any needless distress. Another example is provided by the *kamikaze*, the pilots who embarked on suicide missions during WWII. These people, almost all of whom practiced Zen, were capable of attending to their duties and even to have fun, even though they knew that at any given time they could be asked to fly a mission without hope of returning.

The fourth stage implies the "rejection of the Ego." Not only is it necessary to stop feeling "important," but also to believe that one's individual existence is real. The attachment to the Ego is the most difficult bond to rescind; only then one will arrive at the threshold of an "enlightened consciousness," which is synonymous with a state of super-individuality and of active impersonality. In fact, this higher dimension, which, in a certain sense could also be characterized as "contemplation," is not associated with a withdrawn and cloistered life, but is rather understood as a state of consciousness which should be permanent and thus permeate every experience or activity. There is a saying: "To be attached to no thing is contemplation; if you understand this, you will never cease to contemplate, even as you go, stay, sit or lay down."

From another perspective, a distinction is made between five degrees of discipline, the so-called *Ko-kun-go-i*, namely the "five degrees of merit."

The first degree is the "level of revulsion," which corresponds to the disciple who turns from the outer to the inner world, escaping the domination of the former. A special allegory is employed: the higher Self, to which one aspires, is represented as sovereign, whom one serves as a subject. Second, comes the "level of service," characterized by loyalty toward this inner Master and by a constant "service," characterized by obedience, affection, fear to offend, just as it is expected from a king's personal attendant. What follows is the "level of valor," which must be displayed in fighting, routing and subjugating a rebel army of passions and instincts which has risen up against its king. At this level one is promoted from personal attendant to general. The fourth level is the

"level of cooperation." One does not merely fight and "defend the Center," but joins the ranks of those who advise the "sovereign" about State affairs and social order. The last level is called the "level of super-merit," (*Ko-ko*) and it is the dwelling place of the sovereign himself, with whom one identifies. At this stage, all actions cease, and the spiritual sovereignty and state of consciousness characterized by a higher freedom, are finally realized.

The symbolic or allegorical representation of the various stages of spiritual discipline, as it is practiced in Zen, is very important, because it can act as liaison between the inner domain and the outer world; in other words, it shows how Zen succeeded in becoming incorporated into the official Shintoist religion of Japan, which, as I have said, had as its cornerstone the cult of the Emperor. We can say that the *samurai* projected onto the Emperor his own spiritual ideal; in the Emperor the *samurai* saw the symbolic "sovereign" I have just described in the allegory of the five levels of merit. In this way, at least in principle, a parallelism was established between the spiritual and the political discipline of an elite. This parallelism was able to bestow a higher meaning on everything that is active commitment, service, struggle, sacrifice, knowledge and wisdom for the welfare and the power of the community, of which the Emperor (*Tenno*) was the apex.

All of this took on a "ritual" value for the *samurai*, as well as a value of a path of inner realization. Thus, even the supreme sacrifice of one's life for the sake of the nation, was considered by the *samurai* as the sacrifice of the ephemeral and limited part of himself in favor of the "Higher Self," which participates in the so-called "Great Liberation."

These examples will hopefully shed some light on the meaning of the way of the *samurai*. A careful reader will notice some correspondence with orientations which even the West knew once, although in different forms. It will suffice here to mention the ascetical-martial ideal of the medieval orders of knights; the value given during the Middle Ages to "faithfulness," so much that it became a sacrament of sorts as well as the criterion to discriminate ontologically between human beings. From this imperial ideal, there flowed the transcendent and sacred justifications which the *Ghibellins* enunciated, when they referred to a mysterious "royal religion of Melchizedek."

A few years ago Japan loomed, in the modern world, as a unique and marvelous example of a civilization in which the jealous preservation of traditional secular ideas went hand in hand with a high degree of modernization of the external structures. Unfortunately, following Japan's collapse in WWII, this equilibrium was broken, and the energies of the Yamato race, namely the Japanese, have been invested in the re-edification of the external world. The result has been an "economic miracle" which has placed Japan among the main industrial and economic super-powers; in the meantime, especially in the great cities, life and customs have been contaminated to a high degree, and without much regret, by modern Western influences, especially by American ones. This contamination can easily be seen in movies and in various documentaries.

Yukio Mishima's bloody act, his *hara-kiri*, should have impressed the meaning of "Awaken, Japan!," analogous to "*Deutschland, erwache!*" which had been a rallying cry in central Europe following WWI. Sadly, Mishima's gesture has just been considered an oddity, and some even called it "theatrical." If modern developments continue their course, Mishima's death will only be a distant memory of the past and never be seen in a proper light, namely as an example of high paradigmatic value. But again, this will be yet another sign of the general and unstoppable advent of an era, which even in times of old, had been foreseen and described in terms of a "dark age": the *Kali-yuga*.

THE MEANING AND CONTEXT OF ZEN

We know the kind of interest Zen has evoked even outside specialized disciplines, since being popularized in the west by D.T. Suzuki through his books *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. These works have also been translated into French. This popular interest is due to the paradoxical encounter between East and West. The ailing West perceives that Zen has something "existential" and surrealistic to offer. Zen's notion of a spiritual realization, free from any faith and any bond, not to mention the mirage of an instantaneous and somehow gratuitous "spiritual breakthrough," capable of relieving all existential anguishes, has exercised a fascinating attraction on many Westerners. However, this is true, for the most part, only superficially. There is a considerable difference between the spiritual dimension of the "philosophy of crisis," which has become popular in the West as a consequence of its materialistic and nihilist development, and the spiritual dimension of Zen, which has been rooted in the spirituality of the Buddhist tradition. Any true encounter between Zen and the West, presupposes, in a Westerner, either an exceptional predisposition, or the capability to operate a *metanoia*. By *metanoia* I mean an inner turnabout, affecting not so much one's intellectual "attitudes," but rather a dimension which in every time and in every place has been conceived as a deeper reality.

Zen was a secret doctrine and not to be found in scriptures. It was passed on by the Buddha to his disciple Mahakassapa. This secret doctrine was introduced in China around the sixth century C.E. by Bodhidharma (see cover illustration). The canon was transmitted in China and Japan through a succession of teachers and "patriarchs." In Japan it is a living tradition and has many advocates and numerous *Zendos* ("Halls of Meditation.")

As far as the spirit informing the tradition is concerned, Zen may be considered as a continuation of early Buddhism. Buddhism arose as a vigorous reaction against the theological speculation and the shallow ritualism into which the ancient Hindu priestly caste had degraded after possessing a sacred, lively wisdom since ancient times. Buddha made *tabula rasa* of all this: he focused instead on the practical problem of how to overcome what in the popular mind is referred to as "life's suffering." According to esoteric teachings, this suffering was considered as the state of caducity, restlessness, 'thirst' and forgetfulness

typical of ordinary people. Having followed the path leading to spiritual awakening and to immortality without anyone's help, Buddha pointed the way to those who felt an attraction to it. It is well known that Buddha is not a name, but an attribute or a title meaning "the awakened One," "He who has achieved enlightenment," or "the awakening." Buddha was silent about the content of his experience, since he wanted to discourage people from assigning to speculation and philosophizing a primacy over action. Therefore, unlike his predecessors, he did not talk about *Brahman* (the absolute), or about *Atman* (the transcendental Self), but only employed the term *nirvana*, at the risk of being misunderstood. Some, in fact, thought, in their lack of understanding, that *nirvana* was to be identified with the notion of "nothingness," an ineffable and evanescent transcendence, almost bordering on the limits of the unconscious and of a state of unaware non-being.

So, in a further development of Buddhism, what occurred again, *mutatis mutandis*, was exactly the situation against which Buddha had reacted; Buddhism became a religion, complete with dogmas, rituals, scholasticism and mythology. It eventually became differentiated into two schools: *Mahayana* and *Hinayana*. The former was more grandiose in metaphysics and eventually grew complacent with its abstruse symbolism. The teachings of the latter school were more strict and to the point, and yet too concerned about the mere moral discipline, which became increasingly monastic. Thus the essential and original nucleus, namely the esoteric doctrine of the enlightenment, was almost lost.

At this crucial time Zen appeared, declaring the uselessness of these so-called methods and proclaiming the doctrine of *satori* . *Satori* is a fundamental inner event, a sudden existential breakthrough, corresponding in essence to what I have called the "awakening." But this formulation was new and original and it constituted a radical change in approach. *Nirvana*, which had been variously considered as the alleged Nothingness, as extinction, and as the final end result of an effort aimed at obtaining liberation (which according to some may require more than one lifetime), now came to be considered as the *normal human condition*. By these lights, every person has the nature of Buddha and every person is already liberated, and therefore, situated above and beyond birth and death. It is only necessary to become aware of it, to realize it, *to see within one's nature*, according to Zen's main expression. *Satori* is like a timeless opening up. On the one hand, *satori* is something sudden and radically different from all the ordinary human states of consciousness; it is like a catastrophic trauma within ordinary consciousness. On the other hand, *satori* is what leads one back to what, in a higher sense, should be considered as normal and natural; thus, it is the exact opposite of an *ecstasis*, or trance. It is the rediscovery and the appropriation of one's true nature: it is the enlightenment which draws out of ignorance or out of the subconscious the deep reality of what was and will always be, regardless of one's condition in life.

The consequence of *satori* is a completely new way to look at the world and at life. To those who have experienced it, everything is the same (things, other

beings, one's self, "heaven, the rivers and the vast earth"), and yet everything is fundamentally different. It is as if a new dimension was added to reality, transforming its meaning and value. According to the Zen Masters, the essential characteristic of the new experience is the overcoming of every dualism: of the inner and outer; the I and not-I; of finitude and infinity; being and non-being; appearance and reality; "empty" and "full"; substance and accidents. Another characteristic is that any value posed by the finite and confused consciousness of the individual, is no longer discernible. And thus, the liberated and the non-liberated, the enlightened and the non-enlightened, are yet one and the same thing. Zen effectively perpetuates the paradoxical equation of *Mahayana* Buddhism, *nirvana=samsara*, and the Taoist saying "the return is infinitely far." It is as if Zen said: liberation should not be looked for in the next world; this very world is the next world; it is liberation and it does not need to be liberated. This is the point of view of *satori*, of perfect enlightenment, of "transcendent wisdom" (*prajnaparamita*).

Basically, this consciousness is a shift of the self's center. In any situation and in any event of ordinary life, including the most trivial ones, the ordinary, dualistic and intellectual sense of one's self is substituted with the sense of a being who no longer perceives an "I" opposed to a "non-I", and who transcends and overcomes any antithesis. This being eventually comes to enjoy a perfect freedom and incoercibility. He is like the wind, which blows where it wills, and like a naked being which is everything and possesses everything because he has let go and abandoned everything, embracing poverty.

Zen, or at least mainstream Zen, emphasizes the discontinuous, sudden and unpredictable character of *satori* disclosure. In regard to this, Suzuki was at fault when he took issue with the techniques used in Hindu schools such as *Samkya* and *Yoga*. These techniques were also contemplated in early Buddhist texts. Suzuki employed the simile of water, which in a moment turns into ice. He also used the simile of an alarm, which, as a consequence of some vibration, suddenly goes off. There are no disciplines, techniques or efforts, according to Suzuki, which by themselves may lead one to *satori*. On the contrary, it is claimed that *satori* often occurs spontaneously, when one has exhausted all the resources of his being, especially the intellect and logical faculty of understanding. In some cases *satori* is said to be facilitated by violent sensations and even by physical pain. Its cause may be the mere perception of an object as well as any event in ordinary life, provided a certain latent predisposition exists in the subject.

Regarding this, some misunderstandings may occur. Suzuki acknowledged that "generally speaking, there are no specific indications on the inner work preceding *satori*." However, he talked about the necessity of first going through "a true baptism of fire." After all, the very institution of the so-called "Halls of Meditation" (*Zendo*), where those who strive to obtain *satori* submit themselves to a regimen of life which is partially analogous to that of some Catholic religious orders, bespeaks the necessity of a preliminary preparation. This

preparation may last for several years. The essence of Zen seems to consist in a maturation process, identical to the one in which one almost reaches a state of an acute existential instability. At that point, the slightest push is sufficient to produce a change of state, a spiritual breakthrough, the opening which leads to the "intuitive vision of one's nature." The Masters know the moment in which the mind of the disciple is mature and ready to open up; it is then that they eventually give the final, decisive push. This push may sometimes consist of a simple gesture, an exclamation, in something apparently irrelevant, or even illogical and absurd. This suffices to induce the collapse of the false notion of individuality. Thus, *Satori* replaces this notion with the "normal state," and one assumes the "original face, which one had before creation." One no longer "chases after echoes" and "shadows." This, under some aspects, brings to mind the existential theme of "failure," or of "being shipwrecked" (*das Scheitern*, in Kierkegaard and in Jaspers). In fact, as I have mentioned, the opening often takes place when all the resources of one's being have been exhausted and one has his back against the wall. This can be seen in relation to some practical teachings methods used by Zen. The most frequently employed methods, on an intellectual plane, are the *koan* and the *mondo*. The disciple is confronted with a saying or with questions which are paradoxical, absurd and sometimes even grotesque and "surrealistic." He must labor with his mind, if necessary for years, until he has reached the extreme limit of all his normal faculties of comprehension. Then, if he dares proceed further on that road, he may find catastrophe, but if he can turn the situation upside down, he may achieve *metanoia*. This is the point where *satori* is usually achieved.

Zen's norm is that of absolute autonomy; no gods, no cults, no idols. To literally empty oneself of everything, including God. "If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him," a saying goes. It is necessary to abandon everything, without leaning on anything, and then to proceed forward, with one's essence, until the crisis point is reached. It is very difficult to say more about *satori*, or to compare it with various forms of initiatory mystical experience whether Eastern or Western. One is supposed to spend only the training period in Zen monasteries. Once the disciple has achieved *satori*, he returns to the world, choosing a way of life that fits his need. One may think of *satori* as a form of transcendence which is brought into immanence, as a natural state, in every form of life.

The behavior which proceeds from the newly acquired dimension, which is added to reality as a consequence of *satori*, may well be summarized by Lao-Tzu's expression: "To be whole in the part." In regard to this, it is important to realize the influence which Zen has exercised on the Far-Eastern way of life. Zen has been called "the samurai's philosophy," and it has also been said that "the way of Zen is identical to the way of archery," or to the "way of the sword." This means that any activity in one's life, may be permeated by Zen and thus be elevated to a higher meaning, to a "wholesomeness" and to an "impersonal activity." This kind of activity is based on a sense of the individual's irrelevance, which nevertheless does not paralyze one's actions, but which rather

confers calm and detachment. This detachment, in turn, favors an absolute and "pure" undertaking of life, which in some cases reaches extreme and distinct forms of self-sacrifice and heroism, inconceivable to the majority of Westerners (e.g., the *kamikaze* in WWII).

Thus, what C.G. Jung claims is simply ridiculous, namely that Psychoanalysis, more than any other Western school of thought, is capable of understanding Zen. According to Jung, *satori* coincides with the state of wholeness, devoid of complexes or inner splitting, which psychoanalytic treatment claims to achieve whenever the intellect's obstructions and its sense of superiority are removed, and whenever the conscious dimension of the soul is reunited with the unconscious and with "Life." Jung failed to realize that the methods and presuppositions of Zen, are exactly the opposite of his own. There is no "unconscious," as a distinct entity, to which the conscious has to be reconnected; Zen speaks of a super-conscious vision (enlightenment, *bodhi* or "awakening"), which actualizes the "original and luminous nature" and which, in so doing, destroys the unconscious. It is possible though, to notice similarities between Jung's views and Zen's, since they both talk about the feeling of one's "totality" and freedom which is manifested in every aspect of life. However, it is important to explain the level at which these views appear to coincide.

Once Zen found its way to the West, there was a tendency to "domesticate" and to moralize it, playing down its potential radical and "antinomian" (namely, antithetical to current norms) implications, and by emphasizing the standard ingredients which are held so dear by "spiritual" people, namely love and service to one's neighbor, even though these ingredients have been purified in an impersonal and non-sentimental form. Generally speaking, there are many doubts on the "practicability" of Zen, considering that the "doctrine of the awakening" has an initiatory character.

Thus, it will only be able to inspire a minority of people, in contrast to later Buddhist views, which took the form of a religion open to everyone, or of a code of mere morality. As the re-establishment of the spirit of early Buddhism, Zen should have remained an esoteric doctrine. It has been so as we can see by examining the legend concerning its origins. However, Suzuki himself was inclined to give a different account; he emphasized those aspects of *Mahayana* which "democratize" Buddhism (after all, the term *Mahayana* has been interpreted to mean "Great Vehicle," even in the sense that it extends to wider audiences, and not just to a few elect). If one was to fully agree with Suzuki, some perplexities on the nature and on the scope of *satori* may arise; more specifically one should ask whether such an experience merely affects the psychological, moral or mental domain, or whether it affects the ontological domain, as is the case of every authentic initiation. In that event, it can only be the privilege of a very restricted number of people.

NOTE

[1] This century-old belief, deeply rooted in the Japanese people, has been shaken only after the defeat which Japan suffered in WWII.

Julius Evola

Yoga, Immortality, & Freedom

Yoga, may well he said to be that portion of the heritage of Indian wisdom—nay, of the wisdom of the East as a whole—that is most familiar to Western Europeans and to Americans. Even newspaper readers and readers of popular fiction of the Somerset Maugham type, have an idea—confused though it may be—of Yoga and the yogis. Ever since the opening of the century they have attracted the attention of the West. And here it should be noted that at first, rather than of the serious studies made by Oriental scholars, it has been a question of superficial works written less with a view to making the theory known, than for acquainting the reader with the techniques followed to secure results on the spiritual plane and to produce supernormal phenomena. It is known that among these popularizers a foremost place is held by Ramacharaka, the pseudonym used by an American. His works however have often been mere profanations and distortions. The real substance and final aims of Yoga are often set aside in favor of commonplace applications and adaptations such as physical training, psychic training, the secret of success, deep breathing as a branch of hygiene, mental treatment of disease, Americanized Yoga, and so forth.

Perhaps still more regrettable has been the insertion of Yoga in a vaguely spiritualized framework or in a purely fanciful one. In this field the record has been beaten by the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Yogananda, a book on the level of fairytales for children which in the West has scored a bookselling success and has been translated into several languages. As Yogananda is a Hindu, it should be noted that the spate of Western popularizers and adapters has been followed by another of writers exported from India, attracted abroad by the environment prepared by the Western popularizers. This second group has given rise to a dangerous misunderstanding. Persons lacking the knowledge required for discriminating have thought that the mere fact of being a Hindu sufficed to make a man an authority on Hindu doctrines. Now, for intrinsic reasons due to the essentially esoteric nature of real Yoga, there is good reason to presume that those Orientals who feel the need of popularizing such doctrines and who become, so to speak, commercial travelers, peddling their goods in the West, can only be spurious exponents of their traditions. The same may be said of some Indians who

have made themselves readily "accessible" as "masters" in their own country, opening study centers, sometimes provided with typist, an administrative department, a correspondence bureau, etc. As a result of this, it often happens that those Westerners who have succeeded in penetrating and illustrating the real essence of the traditional wisdom of India are asked if they have not been engaged in the construction of some abstract ideal of their own, so different is the level of the teachings they impart to that of the authentic Indians of our day who have become the exporters and vulgarizers of the ancient wisdom.

It is only recently that scientific studies on Yoga by Westerners are keeping pace with those works of divulgation, as contributions in the domain of orientalism and the history of religions. But here we meet with the obstacle created by the "objective method" which aims at an exclusively exterior, documentary, and informative exactness. It is like undertaking the study of the geometry of solids with the means provided by plane geometry only. In the case of Yoga if the "depth dimension" be set aside, little remains but an empty husk, of little use not only in the practical but also in the theoretical field; it is little more than an object of curiosity. Nevertheless, in several Western circles which are serious and not merely interested in vague "spirituality," the possible importance of Yoga in its bearing on the problems besetting the modern mind is beginning to be felt. Significant in this connection is the subtitle given to a collection of studies on Yoga recently published by J. Masui: "The Science of the Whole Man."

Another work on the scientific plane recently published is Mircea Eliade's *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* of which we wish to speak here. Having studied for three years in the University of Calcutta under Surendranath Dasgupta, the well-known author of several books on Indian philosophy and religion, and having spent some time in the ashram of Rishikesh, near the Himalayas, Eliade would seem to be in an exceptionally favorable position for dealing with this subject. Nevertheless we are inclined to think that Eliade's qualifications for the task he has undertaken are not due to these circumstances, except as regards his mastery of philology, his knowledge of the texts, and his general information. In spite of his undoubted talents, Prof. Dasgupta is a markedly westernized Indian who follows the method of "neutral exposition," and the ashram of Rishikesh, like others more or less accessible, is not so much a center of severe initiation and supervised practice as an environment whose atmosphere is similar to that of the "religious retreats" of the West. Eliade owes his special qualifications to another source; they derive from the fact that before going to India he had acquired knowledge of metaphysical and esoteric doctrines which as such are not of an "official" character. It is essentially to those doctrines that Eliade is indebted for some points of view that place his works on a different plane from those of most

writers on oriental ideas and the history of religions. All this, however, is not placed in the foreground. Eliade is very anxious to keep in line with the academic world of the West. Among the many hundreds of authors he quotes it would be difficult to find works that do not enjoy definite academic recognition. One might ask if this does not conceal an attempt to introduce a Trojan Horse into the citadel of official culture, an effort which would seem on the one hand to have met with success, as shown by the favorable and unusually prompt reception given to Eliade's works by those circles, but which is not exempt from the danger of "counter shocks."

Our fundamental opinion of Eliade's work on Yoga may be expressed by saying that it is the most complete of all those that have been written on this subject in the domain of the history of religions and of Orientalism. One cannot mention another that for wealth of information, for comparisons, for philological accuracy, for the examination and utilization of all previous contributions, stands on the same level. But when once this has been admitted, some reservations have to be made. In the first place it would seem that the material he handles has often got the better of the writer. I mean to say that in his anxiety to make use of all, really all, that is known on the several varieties of Yoga and on what is directly or indirectly connected therewith, he has neglected the need of discriminating and selecting so as to give importance only to those parts of Yoga that are standard and typical, avoiding the danger that the reader lose track of the essential features by confusing them with the mass of information on secondary matters, variations, and side products. Looking at it from this standpoint, we are even led to wonder whether Eliade's previous book *Yoga, essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne* (Paris, 1936), is not in some respects superior to this last one, which is a reconstruction of the former. In the first book the essential points of reference were more clearly outlined, they were less smothered by the mass of information brought together, and the references to less-known forms of Yoga, such as the Tantric and others, were more clearly pointed out.

In the new edition the scrupulous desire to omit nothing has led to the admission of matter which cannot but give a feeling of contamination. Such are the passages on the relations between Yoga and Shamanism and forms of sorcery, necromancy, and even cannibalism present in the religious practices and in the folklore and magic of the natives. Such relationships, even though so studied as to establish the due distances and show the possible "degradations of an ideology due to the incomprehension of the symbolism it contained" may be of interest to the specialist, but they cannot but trouble those who are interested in the superior and "eternal" content of Yoga. Such a reader would have preferred that all such references had been either omitted or abbreviated to the indispensable minimum.

Problems of this kind have, moreover been already dealt with by Eliade in another of his works, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, and the present references are often nothing but lengthy repetitions. They could have been avoided, thus assuring the new book a character of greater "purity."

But for all this, the reader can clearly see here the supreme purpose of the true Yoga, which is the attainment of immortality, the "deconditioning" of the human being, absolute freedom, the active attainment of the "unconditioned." Students of these subjects well know that in Yoga, as in Indian metaphysics in general and still more clearly in Buddhism, immortality has a quite special meaning. In a certain sense, every man is immortal, for according to the doctrine under consideration, death does not end him, but his life is reproduced in an indefinite series of rebirths. The purpose of Yoga is to destroy this immortality, replacing it by that pertaining to a state free from all conditionality, whether cosmic or divine.

Eliade calls attention to the fact that existence in the heavens, divine life, what in Western religions is conceived of as Paradise, would seem, judged by this standard, to be a temptation and an arrest: one must place oneself at a point beyond all this. In this connection he might perhaps have quoted the *Sutta* of the "Visit on Brahma" of the *Majjhimonikaya*, where this idea finds its grandest expression. Attention is also called to the part "cognition" plays in the achievement of Yoga, which confers on this achievement a character that might be described as "Olympian." The meaning of cognition as understood by Yoga is indeed that of a "mere awakening producing nothing, which gives immediate revelation of reality," that is to say, of the true nature of the ego, and which thus sets free (p. 42). It is therefore the opposite of a "conquest" understood in the Faustian and activistic sense, and this should be realized by many modern Western sympathizers with yoga who are following a wrong path.

The opposition between the yoga experience and the mystic experience is dearly shown by Eliade. Although he uses the word "mystic" (see also the subtitle of his previous book) in speaking of several matters connected with Yoga, this point is clearly noted by the use he makes of an original expression "enstasy" instead of ecstasy (see pp. 89 ff). "Yoga is not a technique of ecstasy; on the contrary, it endeavors to realize complete concentration, to attain enstasy." As the meaning of "ecstasy" is "out-standing" so the meaning of "enstasy" is "in-standing," a return to the metaphysical center of one's own being as though resuming possession of a throne that has been deserted through that mysterious transcendental fact that Hindu tradition designates by the expression *maya.* While Eliade stresses this opposition particularly in the case of shamanism, it holds good morphologically also for the relations between Yoga and mysticism.

Thus Eliade interprets as "enstasy" *samadhi* itself, the ultimate aim of classical Yoga. And he thus also overcomes the idea of those who, knowing nothing of experiences of this kind, believe that this ultimate term is a kind of trance, a condition of reduced consciousness, almost of unconsciousness ("a zero point between consciousness and unconsciousness" as Rhys Davids said referring to *nirvana*), whereas it is really a state of super-consciousness. The strange thing is that not only Westerners have fallen into so gross an error. We have, for instance, seen D. T. Suzuki suggest an interpretation of this kind (even if in defense of Zen as a specific tendency) in relation to the Yoga of Samkhya and similar mahayanic doctrines.

It would perhaps have been useful to develop in this field a comparison between the horizons of Yoga and those of psychoanalysis. All those Westerners who believe they have made such an extraordinary discovery with their psychoanalysis (Jung goes as far as to assert presumptuously, that psychoanalysis alone makes "scientific" understanding of the learning of the East possible) should realize that the positive side of psychoanalysis had been previously discovered centuries and centuries before, by Yoga as part of a full knowledge of man, and not of that mutilated, deformed, and contaminated anthropology, which provides the basis of Freudianism and of all its more or less orthodox derivatives.

Reservations must, however, be made as regards that which arouses the Yoga vocation. From the external, historical point of view it is true that Yoga arose from the need of a practical (and we would add: active) experience of sacred things and as a reaction against metaphysical speculations and fossilized ritual. But when it comes to the existentialist motive, we are far from agreeing with Eliade when he writes: "Freedom from suffering, that is *the* principal aim of all Hindu philosophies and all Hindu mysticism" (p. 26). It may appear to be so if only the more popular exoteric aspects of the teaching are taken into account. But this is not true even of Buddhism, as we have shown in one of our works (*The Doctrine of Awakening: The Attainment of Self-Mastery According to the Earliest Buddhist Texts* [London, 1951], pp. 59 ff.); after Stcherbatsky had already shown (*The Central Conception of Buddhism* [London, 1906]) that a deeper meaning could be given to *duhka* than the vulgar one of "pain." The very word *klicta* applied to states of consciousness to be suppressed by the practice of Yoga, properly means "impure" (in a metaphysical, not in a moral sense) and does not mean "painful." The real starting point of Yoga (and of Buddhism itself) is the reaction of a soul aspiring to the absolute as against a contingent, unstable existence, conditioned by agitation, subject to change, existence that includes in its emotional aspects both pain and pleasure and even the beatitude of the most radiant celestial gods. What Eliade states is therefore incorrect, although the book

contains matter enough to lead us to a just view of things.

The use in the early chapters of the book of a "vegetative" analogy to describe the Yogic mode of existence, also seems to us unsuitable. Recourse to a "mineral" analogy would be better suited. It would better express Yogic immobility, the "arrest of the flow," the concentration of consciousness on "being" as opposed to "life," and its ritual expressions also: the immobility of the *asana,* the impassiveness of the features, etc.

It would perhaps be better, when dealing with the state of existence that has to be overcome, not to introduce the notion of "history," an exclusively Western notion, which finds no match in the world of Hindu metaphysics. In it, as we know, the basic idea is, instead, that of *samsara*, of purely irrational becoming, which differs widely from the notion of "history" and even from the simple condition of temporality for, in the Hindu conception, *samsara* and the world of *maya* are also inclusive of states in which time, as we know it, is non-existent. We have made this remark because Eliade has a special personal notion of his own, which, though it supplies a valuable and legitimate key for the interpretation of many things in the world of myths and rites, is not applicable to all cases. We are dealing with the motive of the destruction of "history" by the return to the prehistoric and a-temporal state of the origins. This scheme can be applied wherever cyclical structures are in evidence. We do not think there is much place for it in the Yoga field. Eliade himself has what is really at issue, i.e., a "break of the level," not only of the level of human, historical experience, whether individual or collective, but also of the cosmic level. The legitimate point of reference is, therefore, that of a doctrine of the multiple states of being, seen as a *vertical system*, whereas the idea of a pre-temporal (prehistoric) origin implies always a residuum of "horizontalism." At a certain point in *samsara* there is an arrest; after which one proceeds not so much backwards as upwards, liberating oneself from all conditioning circumstances. A metaphysical itinerary, this, which in the ancient Western civilization was expressed by the symbolism of the journey through successive planetary spheres and the progressive "unclothing" that took place in each of them while an equivalent of this is given in the Tantric Yoga by the ascent of consciousness transported by the power of the *kundalini* through the seven *chakras.*

We have referred to Tantrism, and one of the principal merits of Eliade's book is that it has dealt fully with this current of Indian spirituality, still little known in the West and which when it has been studied has been generally decried because of its connection with sex magic rites and the use of women. While remaining faithful to the style of "neutral" exposition, more especially in this matter, Eliade

suggests the key to interpretations of undoubted value, based always on extensive documentary evidence, as when dealing with the rites of "transubstantiation," "polyvalent languages," etc. So also on the matter of "hyperphysical physiology" or "subtle physiology," which plays an important part in Tantric Yoga, Eliade holds himself afar from the materializing opinions formulated by some Orientalists and some physicians who are ignorant of the very principles underlying such notions.

But as Tantric Yoga follows a course which differs widely from that followed by classical Yoga, it would seem likely that important results might have been obtained by engaging in research on typological and morphological lines. It seems to us that in several cases the different forms of Yoga arise not only from technical differences but from a difference in the spirit that inspires them. The background, which is to some extent immanentistic, of Tantric practices differs substantially from the transcendent one of the Yoga of strict type and of patanjalian orientation. Jnana Yoga and Hatha Yoga (taking the latter in its deeper sense which is not that of "physical Yoga") may have definite differential implications in their general vision of the world (we have referred to it in our work *The Yoga of Power*. We may set up the ideal of liberation against the more positive one of liberty (and here we may refer to the Tantric Siddha and the Kaula whose antinomianism has precedents in some veins of the most ancient Upanishads and Brahmanic literature). The stress laid on the importance of the body in its esoteric aspect may also afford a clue, while it is quite clear that the process of conferring cosmic sense on the body may have a significance of its own which must be referred back to the spirituality of the Vedic origins, and contrasts with the ascetic trends on a dualistic background.

These considerations lead us to the much debated problem of the origins of Yoga. It would seem that Eliade is inclined to believe in a non-Indo-European, non-"Aryan" origin. In his first book, this view was more stressed and was extended to cover not only Yoga but part of Hindu ascetic tendencies in general. As is known, some inquirers with racial views had already formulated the theory that all forms of asceticism and practices of mortification of the flesh were foreign—*artfremd*—to the spirituality of the Aryan conquerors of India, and that all such notions in Hinduism should be traced back to exogenous influences and to a world-outlook no less foreign—*artfremd*. At first the reference made here was to Dravidian and Kosalian natives; later on the question arose of the archaic civilization brought to light by the excavations at Mohenjo-Daro. It is claimed that among the objects found at Mohenjo-Daro there are figures in the postures—*asana*—of Yogis and ascetics, along with divinities who are not found in the Vedas, while they play an important part in many currents of Yogic and ascetic

but also devotional intonation of the later period. All this strikes us as rather problematic for we consider that in such matters morphological considerations must be decisive. Eliade writes: "Yoga, in so far as it represents a reaction against ritualism and scholastic speculation, belongs to the aboriginal tradition and conflicts with the Indo-European [i.e. Aryan] religious heritage" (p. 356). He adds "We should remember that the absence of the Yoga complex in other Indo-European peoples would confirm that this technique is a product of the Asian soil of the Indian territory" (ibid.). All this is not quite right. As regards the first point, we may note that early Buddhism was also a reaction to ritualism and speculation, but it was of purely Aryan origin, starting with the person of its founder. For the rest, the consideration of historical metaphysics must be introduced in a morphological framework that we have already outlined elsewhere (in the already quoted *The Doctrine of Awakening* and also in our *Revolt Against the Modern World*). Account must be taken of that regression of mankind from the spirituality of the origins, to which the traditions of all peoples bear witness and to which, indeed, Eliade himself makes frequent reference in the course of his researches. As a result of this regression, states of spirituality which in the beginning had an almost natural character and were at the basis of a sacramental and ritual conception of the world, were later on attained only exceptionally as the result of ascetic and violent practices. In our opinion this is the historical place of Yoga also, as *spirit.* In other Indo-European traditions it is matched by the Mysteries and initiation practices which, though varying widely in form and method, have the like significance of an experimental *opus restaurationis* and occupy the same position of Yoga when considered in relation to the origins. It may be that in the framework of Hindu spirituality, the transition to a phase of this kind, which corresponds to Yoga, was favored by exogenous influences: *favored,* not *determined.* Beyond possible exterior resemblances of themes, we must consider the possibility that, when passing from one civilization to another, they acquired a widely different meaning. Thus, for instance, it seems pretty certain that the Mohenjo-Daro civilization was essentially a "Mother civilization," a civilization of the "Divine Woman" with a tellurian or lunar background belonging morphologically to the same cycle of southern, paleo-Mediterranean, and even South-American civilizations. The classic spirit of Yoga is, on the other hand, exclusively virile and uranic. We have knowledge of an asceticism which was known also to the Mother civilizations (from the Maya to the Babylonians). But it had a character of mortification which is quite absent from Yoga. Even the central theme of that civilization, the Divine Woman, revives in Hinduism, through the Tantric metaphysics, in a strongly spiritualized form which would be unaccountable if it be not related to the Aryan heritage and to the Upanishads

themselves, while its original features survive only in the reemergence of popular orgiastic or devotional cults.

The examination of those problems would lead us far afield. But in any case it seems to us that Yoga should be considered only as an integral part of Indo-European spirituality of the purest kind. For this reason also it seems to us that the search for relations with the drosses of Shamanism as they are present in the origins of the Aryan peoples. Or elsewhere, is of no interest. The only thing of interest, as we have said, is the definition of the autonomous features of a spiritual phenomenon which should be examined there where it arose in conformity with its "idea" and therefore in its typical imperfection, liberating itself from empirical conditioning factors.

After this glance at the contents of Eliade's new book we are tempted to inquire of him a somewhat prejudicial question: to whom is the book addressed? As we have openly declared, it is a fundamental work for specialists in the field not only of Oriental research, but also in that of the history of religions. But in his introduction Eliade states that the book is addressed also to a wider public and he speaks of the importance that a knowledge of a doctrine such as that of Yoga may have for the solution of the existential problems of the modern Westerner, confirmed as that doctrine is by immemorial experience.

Here complications arise. To meet such a purpose it would be necessary to follow a different plan and to treat the matter in a different way. A Westerner who reads Eliade's book may be able to acquire an idea of Yoga as "*la science intégrale de l'homme* [the integral science of man]," he may acquire knowledge of a teaching that has faced in practice as well as in theory the problem of "deconditioning" man; he will thus add yet one other panorama to the list of the many modern culture has provided him with. His interest will perhaps be more lively than the "neutral" interest of the specialist; he may flirt with the aspects of a "*spiritualite virante*." But on the existential plane the situation will be pretty much the same as it was before, even if the information available be deeper, more accurate, better documented. The possibility of exercising a more direct influence could only be looked for from a book addressed to those who have shown an interest in Yoga and similar sciences not because they seek for information but because they are seeking for a path; a book that in this special field would remove the misunderstandings, the popular notions, the deviations, and the delusions spread by a certain kind of literature to which we referred at the beginning of this article; a book displaying the accuracy and knowledge that we find in this work of Eliade, in as far as it is an exposition kept within the limits of the history of religions. Such a book has perhaps still to be written. But even so the essential need would

not be met, for it is the unanimous opinion of the true masters of Yoga that the key to their science cannot be handed on by the written word.

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Julius Evola

The *Svadharma* Doctrine & Existentialism

In an earlier essay I pointed out the importance of clearing up the points in which a connection between the doctrines of the traditional East and certain very advanced intellectual trends of the West emerges. I then said that in many cases a serious and not amateurish knowledge of the former might well serve to complete the latter, liberating them from their aspect as opinions of a purely individual speculative nature, and also from everything affected by an atmosphere of crisis, such indeed as is that of our own modern Western civilization. In this way it would be possible to rise from those casual intuitions, attained by Europeans who are struggling in a state of profound critical labor, to the plane of an objective and super-personal knowledge, which should be defined as "wisdom" rather than "philosophy."

I here wish to deal in this sense with certain specific aspects of a trend of thought, very fashionable today, known as "existentialism," selecting as a counterpart to it the Hindu doctrine of "*svadharma*" [one's own *dharma* or duty in relation to the larger cosmic order--Ed.].

With reference to existentialism I shall naturally not consider its eccentric and bohemian forms, of a predominantly literary character, which are unfortunately those to which this trend chiefly owes its new popularity. I wish rather to refer to the serious, philosophical existentialism, which took shape even before World War II, and which, after Søren Kierkegaard (and in certain respects Nietzsche), had as its chief interpreters Jaspers, Heidegger, and Barth. I will first try to set forth certain basic ideas of existentialism in the most accessible manner. This task is no easy one in a short article, on account of the peculiar, almost esoteric nature of the terminology of the existentialists, in which many words are often used with meanings wholly different from the usual ones.

The basis of existentialism lies in the conception of "existence." Now this expression must not be taken in the common, simple sense. Existence, according to Kierkegaard, signifies the paradoxical and contradictory point, in which the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal are implied and meet together. For existence here is naturally intended that of the Ego, of the individual being,

which is therefore considered as a synthesis of contradictory elements. His spiritual situation is such that he cannot affirm himself (the finite being who exists in time), without also affirming the "other" than himself (the unconditioned, the temporary, the absolute being); but, on the other hand, he cannot affirm the transcendent, without also affirming himself, the being existing in time. To doubt the one means also to doubt the other. This is the general premise of existentialism, as asserted by all its leading interpreters, from Kierkegaard to Lavelle, from Barth to Jaspers. Here it is suitable to point out the harmony of this line of thought with the views of traditional Hinduism. In the first place, there is the question of method: existentialism seeks to reach an intimacy in the very center of the individual, which should at the same time have the value of metaphysical experience. But this may be said to be the method of the whole of upanishadic yoga and also Buddhist philosophy, to which we may well apply the formula of a "transcendental experimentalism." In the second place it is obvious that this ambiguous meeting point between the center of the finite being and the unconditioned more or less reminds us of the *atma*, which presents the actual features, so to speak, of an "immanent transcendency," of something which is the Ego, and at the same time a super-Ego, the eternal Brahman.

Nevertheless the paradox of "existence," understood in the above-mentioned sense, takes the form of a problem. We find ourselves, as it were, before an unsustainable position of unstable equilibrium, which must be solved in the function of one or the other of the two terms, which meet in the individual, but seem to exclude, to contradict each other as well: the conditioned and the unconditioned the temporal and the non-temporal.

The two possible solutions correspond to two directions actually followed by existentialism, in connection with which I may mention the names of Heidegger and Sartre on the one hand, of Jaspers and above all of Barth on the other.

The solution proper to Heidegger's philosophy is that of the man which tries to find the unconditioned in the transitory. The point according to this thinker, presents itself as follows: existence in time means existing as an individual and as an individualized being. But individuality signifies particularity, it signifies the affirmation and assumption of a certain group of possibilities, to the exclusion of others, the whole of the others; but these subsist, they live within the individual, they constitute the sense of the infinite within him, and tend to find expression, to realize themselves. This determines the movement of the Ego in time, a movement conceived in the sense of emerging from ourselves (from our own defined particularity), as a tendency to realize all that which we have excluded from ourselves, to live through it in a succession of experiences: a succession

which evolves as time, and which should represent the substitute for totality, for all that which the individual, as such, cannot be simultaneously. Naturally, to the infinitude of possibilities corresponds necessarily the infinitude of time, and all this gives to some extent the feeling of pursuing one's own shadow: a pursuit without ever attaining, without ever entirely gaining possession of oneself, so as to calm and solve the antithesis and the "anguish" proper to "existence."

This solution of Heidegger's thus ends in a sort of metaphysical justification of sanctification of that which, in Hindu terms, might be called the *samsara*, the *samsaric* consciousness. This seems to us a dangerous position, inasmuch as it goes towards the various modern Western philosophies of immanency, of "Life," of becoming, a position which, in our opinion, can with difficulty be linked up with any traditional conception of the world. Indeed, a non-concealed gloomy pessimism broods over the whole of Heidegger's philosophy.

The second existentialist trend, that of Jaspers and Barth, is in a different situation. Starting from more or less similar premises, importance is given to the concept that, if the individual represents one particular possibility amid an infinity of others, which fall outside from him, this definite possibility emanates from choice. This choice naturally brings us to something which is before time and before existence within time. The solution of the antithesis is given by the "ethics of fidelity": that which we are in time we must assume, we must regard "our own essence as identical to our own existence," we are to remain true to what we are, having the presentiment that it is something eternal, which, through ourselves, becomes "temporalized" itself, that everything which appears as a necessity, as fate, as hardship, sends us to something which is *willed*, to a being which is so because he has chosen to be so, taking on this particular nature, excluding every other possible nature.

Thus, together with the precept of faithfulness to ourselves, there is, in existentialism, also the precept of clarification (*Erhellung*). The rule of life of this existentialism is not the search for something else, the dispersion of ourselves in the infinite, problematic multiplicity of the perspectives presenting themselves in the outer world, and still less does it signify the pursuit in time—as Heidegger claims—of the mirage of the ever-escaping unconditioned; we should instead assume our own perspective or vision of the world, to seize and realize its *meaning*, which is equivalent to saying its transcendental root, that will whereby I am what I am, and that in existence we may realize only on the basis of its traces, of its effects. Then existence will appear to be merely the prosecution in time of something which exists before time, and every necessity or finitude will reveal itself as the consequence of the primordial act of a free power.

Whoever knows the doctrine of *dharma* and of *svadharma* cannot fail to note the analogies with it of these existentialist views. According to the Hindu conception, every being has a nature of his own. It is not mere chance that we are what we are and not something else. To this nature—unless we feel a vocation for a higher ascent—we must remain true; faithfulness to our own nature, whatever it may he, is the highest cult which we may render to the Supreme Spirit.

Thus, to be ourselves to assume our own position and tend to our own individual perfection, without letting ourselves be distracted or seduced by exterior interests, aims or values. There is no nature of our own, a *dharma*, superior or inferior to another, if we take—as we should take—the infinite, that which is beyond time, as measure. Hence to betray one's own *dharma*—the law of one's own nature—to assume the *dharma*—the manner of being, the law, the path—of another is error and fault: fault, not in the moral sense, but in the ontological sense. It is a hurt against the cosmic order—*rta*—equivalent to violence against ourselves; because we thus enter into contradiction with ourselves, we wish to be here, in time, something different from what we had wished to be beyond all time. The effect of this is disintegration, and therefore a descent in the hierarchy of beings (symbolically, hell). These are traditional Hindu concepts which we find expressed in the Laws of Manu, and, in a yet more definite form, in Bhagavad-gita. We know that in India they have not remained mere theory and philosophy, but have exercised a powerful influence on individual and collective life, constituting, among other things, the ethical and metaphysical basis of the caste system, of that system which has been so little understood by Westerners (although in the Middle Ages they had something of the same kind), while it is about to be set aside light-heartedly, by the modernized Oriental.

But, the general vision of the world and of man, in which the *svadharma* doctrine is framed, has dimensions which in existentialism are lacking; for this reason it is such as to integrate and render unexceptionable more than one doubtful point in this Western philosophy.

In this connection Barth must be set aside. He ends up in a theocentrism which enables him to connect existentialism with Christian theology. This theology, as we know, with Thomism defended the theory of "our own nature"—*natura propria*—and the ethics of fidelity to that nature, which is different in each man and is willed by God. But here, in our opinion, we are rising too high, and the reference to the theistic divinity, whose will should be responsible for being in this of that particular manner, is too pat and summary an explanation. The existentialist problem is only solved by faith, by trust in God, even though with the promise of a future vision of all things, and consequently also of ourselves, of

the course of one own life, "*sub specie aeternitatis*," a vision through which all obscurity will disappear. But all this is religion rather than metaphysics, and cannot prove satisfactory to all.

Let us rather return to Jaspers. The defective points of his theories, in which Hindu ideas can be helpful, concern the nature of that "choice," which must have been made on the non-temporal plane and which enables us to explain the coexistence, within existence, of the finite and the infinite. Above all the *place* of this choice remains wholly obscure—not less so than in Kant and Schopenhauer, who had already formulated something of the kind with their theories of the "intelligible character."

That obscurity is inevitable, owing to the practical non-existence, in Western philosophy and in religion itself, of the doctrine of *pre-existence* and of the *multiple states of being*. That, before birth, existed not simply the will of God, creating at His good pleasure souls out of nothing; that instead there had pre-existed a certain consciousness-entity, of which the existence of each one of us on earth is the manifestation—all this is a "*terra incognita*" for the majority of the Western philosophers and theologians: they hardly know anything of this kind.

But without references of this sort the whole existentialist theory suffers from an initial and basic obscurity. Incidentally it should be noticed that we have spoken of the theory of pre-existence, and not of that of "reincarnation" or karma, such as theosophists have disseminated it from the end of the last century in certain Western spiritualist circles. The first theory has nothing to do with the second—the one has a metaphysical, the other a popular character—and, as I have explained on various occasions, taken literally explains nothing, indeed it is an error.

From the first fault the second is derived, which refers to the sense of the act whereby we have wished to be what we find ourselves to be on earth and in time, namely, to the sense of transcendental choice or option, which takes the place of the Divine will and which is also a necessary precondition to be able to speak of responsibility and to justify the precept of fidelity to what we are.

Now, in this Jaspers only sees a fault: to have wished to be individuals signifies having wished to limit ourselves; but to limit ourselves signifies to sin, to sin against the infinite, against the unconditioned, which is fatally denied in all possibilities, in all manners of being excluded from the horizon of that single definite life. And with sin is associated naturally anguish, the famous "existential anguish" of the Ego.

This is indeed a strange idea, which betrays a certain pessimism, of which we find

traces in the earliest Greek philosophy and even in Orphism. If at the beginning of things, if up on high, on the hither side of time, there has truly been a free power, we cannot understand what "fault," what "sin" there can have been for him to have made a choice, for having decided in favor of a given mode of existence and not of another. That thus other possibilities must have been excluded or denied, that is logical and inevitable, nor do we know to whom that freedom should answer.

In any case, to speak here of "sin" is really nonsense. Then we should regard as a sin generating existential anguish the fact that, having a free evening, I elected to spend it in a nightclub, which of course prevents me from doing other things equally possible, such as going to a theatre, or to a lecture, or remaining at home to study, and so on.

The true infinite, for us, and for every true metaphysics, is not that which is, so to speak condemned to its ecstatic and indeterminate infinity, but it is that which it is, which it wishes to be, remaining unconditioned in our every act of its, retaining the sense of its primordial freedom and unconditioned state in all which it has willed and in which it has become. At most, once we have entered into the dominion of temporality, we must bear in mind that which the Far-Easterners call the law of concordant actions and reactions, and which the Hindus call karma, but in the true sense, not in that of the theosophists and popularizers.

It would be sufficient to enter into this order of ideas to confer on the above-mentioned existentialist notions an entirely different meaning, to remove from them all that is "crisis," "anguish," "invocation," or dispersion in a mean arbitrary action; all would pass on to a plane of higher calm, of transparency, of decision. And the precept of being ourselves, of fidelity to ourselves and to the "position" which we have in the reign of temporality, would acquire light—thanks to its relation with a truly unconditioned and super individual order.

Indeed the corresponding Hindu view—which the ancient West already knew (Plotinus, for instance, and even Plato before him)—might act in this sense on the existentialists who really might live their own problems, and this would be one the most significant points of a possible encounter between the thought of the East and the thought of the West.

Note

On the doctrine of *dharma* and castes, see my book *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1995), part I, chapter 14.

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Julius Evola

What Tantrism Means to Modern Western Civilization

One

One of the characteristics of the Hindu doctrine that may be described in a general way as Tantrism is its claim to offer a formulation of the traditional doctrine that is only suitable to the last epoch of the present cycle, i.e., for the Kali Yuga. Notwithstanding its importance, it was little known in the West up to a short time ago. It is said that teachings, rituals, sciences, which might have been suitable during the primordial age (Satya Yuga) are no longer suitable for a humanity living in later epochs, especially in the "dark age."

Therefore, such a humanity can find, not in the Vedas or in other ancient texts, but in the Tantras and the Agamas, the knowledge and the efficient technique allowing it to attain the supreme goal of man: freedom from every form of conditioned existence. Thus the Tantras often present themselves as a "fifth Veda" — as a further revelation corresponding to the present phase of manifestation. They further state that former rituals have become as inefficient as "a snake deprived of its venom" inasmuch as the prevailing qualification *(adhikara)* in man has undergone a complete change.[1]

However, such a point of view is not valid only in the spiritual "space" of Hindu civilization and tradition, because the doctrine of the four ages has, so to speak, a general validity. There are Western doctrines that correspond to the Hindu formulation of this doctrine. It is in fact sufficiently clear that the last phase ("the iron age" in Western terminology) bears all the signs of modern civilization, the

1 With reference to all this, see for example: *Mahanirvana Tantra,* I, 19; II, 7, 14; IV, 47; *Tarapradipa,* 1; Shiva Shiandra: *Tantratattava,* trans. into English by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga* (London: Luzac & Co., 1919).

center of which is the West.[2]

As things are, one may be led to consider the extent to which the "relevance" claimed by Tantrism has a certain objective basis, particularly regarding Western Civilization.

Two

Historically, Tantrism is connected with a characteristic revolution that began in India towards the middle of the first millennium BC. Since that time, certain divine female figures—Shakti—rise to ever-growing importance, accompanying Hindu deities which in the Aryan period appeared as isolated and, in several cases, even obtaining an advantage over them. Shaktism is one of the central aspects of Tantrism.

Now, from a metaphysical point of view, the "divine couple" is a symbol of the two principal aspects of every cosmic principle: the male deity representing the the unchangeable and transcending aspect and the female one representing power, strength, force of manifestation, and, in a certain sense, also the active and immanent aspect. Therefore, the appearance of Shaktism in the ancient Hindu-Aryan world, apart from its popular and devotional forms, is a barometrical sign of a change in beliefs. It tells us how, compared to the former consciousness of man, which was focused on the realm of being, the "manifestation" and "action" aspects of the deity were felt more directly and took on a special importance[3]

Now there is no question whether in this we have simultaneously also the basic character of modern Western civilization, in which immanentism is the by-word. Furthermore, the chief meaning of the word Shakti is capacity to act, authority, and power. Speculative Tantrism conceives the world, life, and man as existing essentially as a sort of power. It speaks of an active "Brahman." Maya, carried back to Maya-Shakti, which no longer means a cosmic illusion, but rather the manifestation of her essence which is made up of will

2 For comparisons among the various formulations of the doctrine of the four ages and its utilization in general metaphysics of history, see Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1995), part II.

3 The fact that in certain aspects Shaktism must be considered as a revival of a pre-Aryan archaic substratum does not alter the aforementioned interpretation.

"*icchamayi*."

Moreover, Kali — an equivalent of Shakti, who according to the Tantra "is entirely awake" in the Kali Yuga — also has her demonic, unchained, and savage aspects. Could it not be that their counterpart in the modern world is whatever can prove the irruption of irrational and elemental forces, a "tellurism" and a demon of collectivistic currents which, at bottom, reveal themselves as the soul of the same world of technology, while their counterpart is made up by the religion of the future, by "vitalistic" theories, and by the discovery of the unconscious-instinctive, nocturnal face of the soul?

Three

It cannot be denied that, under this aspect, there are motives in the Tantric conception capable of serving as the mirror of modern civilization in its most daring and problematic forms. On the other hand, what other point of view could be more fascinating for the Westerner's vocation than the one for which, according to De la Vallée Poussin, the Absolute Self ceases to be an ecstatic experience and becomes instead something that he, who has seen the light, can grasp and master.[4]

In the adept, in the Siddha, and in the Vira, the Tantric Kaula exalt the individual who is superior to every pair of contraries, is free from both good and evil, and whose laws is only his will (*cvecchacari*), thus going much further that Nietzsche's "superman." By following this road, the asceticism of a mortifying type is replaced by Hatha Yoga techniques that tend to rule the inmost forces of the body, together with a wisdom that proclaims, together with *Kularnava-tantra:* "The body is the temple of God and the living consciousness (*jiva)* is the eternal Shiva (*Sadashiva*)."

The ritual Tantric secret *(pancatattva)* proclaims the non-existence of the antithesis between asceticism and enjoyment, between *yoga* and *bhoga*. It promises the possession of the one and of the other, pointing out that the place of liberation is in this world and not in the other one *(yoga bhojate, mokhyate samsarah).*

4 L. De La Vallee Pouissin, *Bouddhisme* (Paris, 1898), 48.

The observance of moral rules as well as of visible rites is, in such circles, declared to pertain only to the *pacu*, to the man bound, obtuse, and resembling an animal, while Tantrism promises the esoteric knowledge that makes one free and breaks all chains.[5]

On the basis of this, one might be tempted to speak of a "modern" and even a "Western" Tantrism. And yet in doing so a misunderstanding would certainly arise. These convergences do not erase a fundamental difference in planes and tendencies. Only by acknowledging this difference would it be possible to admit that Tantrism may lead the way for a Western elite that does not want to become the victim of those experiences whereby an entire civilization is on the verge of being submerged.

Firstly, it is worth stressing the point that in Tantrism the enhancing of forces, truths, and qualifications prevailing in the Kali Yuga does not allow a lower level, nor does it allow the datum of existence, to be considered as an ultimate appeal and still less (as in the case of many of our immanent philosophies) as something that must be and must also be glorified.

The values belonging to the highest spiritual realization, such as the ancient Hindu metaphysical tradition conceived it, are maintained. The actual problem of our age is to find the method to carry it into effect. This method, justly compared to "riding on the back of a tiger," may be summed up in this principle: "In order to obtain freedom, one must employ those same forces that have led to the downfall."

Four

To find the right way in this respect, one must bear in mind that, in the Tantric theory of manifestation, the actual prevalence of the Shaktic element in a given phase (the descending phase, *pravrtti-marga*) does not mean anything when compared to the ratio of metaphysical subordination of the Shakti to the principle opposed to it, Shiva, Purusha, or whatever the "male of the Shakti" may be called. In this way some points of reference already exist that are

5 For more on Tantrism, see Julius Evola, *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1992).

completely missing in the modern views of Western activism, of which, in a certain sense, they are the reverse.

In point of fact, according to Hindu and also Tantric views, all action, dynamism, and becoming has a female and negative character. On the contrary, whatever is permanent, unchangeable, and central has a truly male and positive character, possessing the gift of light and being, or, in other words, is the "Lord of the Scepter" (*vajra-dhara).*

This point, therefore, establishes a definite difference between modern horizons and those belonging to the higher forms of Tantrism. If, in a modern world, it is possible to ascertain a saturation of the Shaktic element, particularly in its lowest, materialistic and irrational aspects, the Shivaitic counterpart is lacking. The latter may be termed the true spiritual virility, closely connected to values, tendencies, and sciences even the ideas of which are now lost in the West.

And all this is, instead, taken in due consideration by Tantrism, and not in terms of a merely abstract speculation but as a realization. It is thus clear to see what meaning this tendency may have for people who, even if taken as individuals in themselves, want to impose a limit to forces which otherwise would only result in dissolution.

Five

Shakti is the basis of Tantric life, but the method consists in understanding it with an intensity which, in a certain sense, renders it self-consuming and makes of it an instrument of transformation and transfiguration for an objective change of plane. It must not he forgotten that the main characteristics of Tantric deities must he considered as symbols of destroying forces, "nude," unfettered, superior to all laws. Kali, Durga, or, in some aspects, Shiva-Rudra himself have such a nature as to be simultaneously the deities of pure transcendence and of internal liberation.

In this connection, a "sacrificial" tendency and a "transforming" moment are to be found in all Tantric methods, even in those that border on magic in a strict sense or on orgiastic revelry, just as a sacred and initiative framing is inseparable to all metaphysics and

from the Tantric idea of the world considered as a "power." This again represents a line of separation, and it is easy to understand fully the condition in which the Western ideal of the affirmation of the Self and its freedoms may avoid destructive revolutions, of which we have already certain grim forebodings.

Six

Leaving aside the more exterior and materialistic aspects of the modern civilization of action, it is now necessary to consider what, in a certain sense, may be taken as its central artery. It is the tendency to glorify man, which began during the Renaissance and which, in passing through critical idealism, ethical rationalism, and the "autonomous" morals of the categorical imperative, has arrived at the training of pure will power and the ideal of the superman.

The basis of this tendency remains, on the whole, on a naturalistic, individualistic, and intellectual plane. In such a way, it ends in a blind alley. If we consider it seriously, it is equivalent to a saturation of strength which, given the limitations of human nature, can only end in a short circuit, in the collapse of the superman into the demonic or into forms of "they are raised to me with exercises," already condemned by ancient wisdom as a dangerous deviation from a true spiritual realization.

There, where one halts in advance of these extreme consequences, it seems clear that, in the West, the only known solution is to give up and to allow religion, in its mystical/humanitarian aspects and forgiveness, to come back into the world.

No less than any other initiatic teaching, even Western ones, Yoga in general, and Tantric and Vajrayanic Yoga in particular, tells us that this alternative may be overcome and that a clear path actually exists, even if according to the saying of the Kathaka Upanishad it looks like walking on a razor's edge. What the West needs to learn here is that it is a question of an essential and ontological change in nature.

To speak of a "superman" may lead to a misunderstanding. The Western superman expresses the extreme limit or potentiality of the human species, while in Yoga it is the bridge from one species to

another one, and, as a goal, it is the detachment from every qualified state, be it human or divine, that one strives to reach through a positive technique confirmed by a multi-millennial tradition, a state that has nothing in common with a demonic state of the intellect and with the prevarications peculiar to the religion of materialistic man.

It is therefore obvious to see where the road ends and a new one begins. In specific reference to the Tantra, there are tendencies in common with the Western vocation to realize an independent and sovereign will.

But, in the first place, this vocation no longer appears as "Luciferian" or "titanic," but, one might say, as "Olympian," if one bears in mind the same Tantric symbolism according to which the Shakti embraces the impassible "divine male" made of light and bearing a scepter and to whom she is the raiment of power.

Secondly, in following this course it is necessary *to do things seriously.* An exceptional qualification is required. Carefulness and an intense concentration are also required, and these have nothing in common with the exercises of immanent or voluntary philosophy and, in a general way, with simple mental attitudes.

Thirdly, the illusions and pride of the individual self, of what in Hindu terms might be called the Samsaric Self or the Self of elements *(Bhutatma)* which is practically the only one known to the great majority of modern Westerners, must be forsaken. In fact the *destruction* of this Self is the condition of true freedom and true power, so that it is the aim of a good number of Yogi techniques as well as of the Tantric ones, even if they are of a Dionysian or orgiastic character.

Seven

All this pertaining to the Kali Yuga must be kept in mind by every Westerner who, although remaining in the same trend in which the predominant forces of his civilization have developed, desires once more by virile means to pave the way towards the higher spheres which he had forsaken under the pretext of conquering the world.

Other factors must also be taken in consideration in order that illusion may not arise and that the contribution of Hindu spirituality

of the Yoga type be well understood.

As already hinted, Tantrism follows above all — as regards Yoga — the way of Hatha Yoga, and this also appears to coincide with modern Western tendencies, because contempt for the body is replaced by the ideal of complete mastery over it. But this mastery is *internal*. In spite of the lack of comprehension due to certain publications divulged in the West, it has nothing of a physical and physiological character.

But the ways leading to the body and originating from the interior, from the "subtle," and along the lines of which also supernormal experiences may develop — as explained in the teaching we are dealing with — present great difficulties for the majority of Westerners on account of internal century-old processes having almost a constitutional character. To modern man the inner side of the body is closed in the same way as is closed the external reality according to its aspects which are not simply physical, sensitive or space-occupying. Yoga points out to the Westerner the way to be followed so that the soul may in reality master the body and — in accordance with the same ancient Western theory of the relation between macrocosm and microcosm — discover in the body thus mastered and rendered conscious, the source of unusual powers. It remains, however, to be seen in what measure anyone may follow this way and acquire a real knowledge of these processes.

The last point to be taken in consideration, particularly because it is generally misconstrued in Western publications, is that it would be difficult to neglect, in realizations of this kind, the transmission of given "influences" of a spiritual and super-individual character brought about by regular organizations of initiation. Just as the short-circuits mentioned above may be caused by immanence and will, one must also point out the difficulty for the individual to surpass himself, unless exceptional cases are taken in consideration, as compared to the whims of a deceptive self-affirmation. We should remember how the greatest European scholar of Tantrism, Sir John Woodroffe, told us that he could not accept the conditions required of him to enter in relations of something more than a simple doctrine with Tantric initiatic organizations.

Eight

In conclusion, what we have stressed before is hereby confirmed. On the one side there is thus a correspondence between some fundamental Tantric ideas and some predominant tendencies of the modern spirit, on account of which one can seriously notice a certain basis in the Tantra's claim to present an idea suitable to the last age, i.e., to the present day. On the other hand, a well-defined line of demarcation exists between the two dominions, in the exposition of which we have spared no effort.

The capability of certain specially qualified Western minds to cross this line corresponds to the measure in which one can remain faithful to the principal way followed by their civilization without thereby being led towards a crisis without solution. They could change, at least on their own account, a strong poison into a healing medicine. The force that causes some to fall, causes in others a resurrection and participation in something supreme and shining, beyond those powers without center and scope that belong to the dark ages.

Translation anonymous, revised by Greg Johnson

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Islam and Tradition: Evola's Thoughts on Islam

by Sean Jobst

While he examined various traditions around the world, both occidental and oriental, Julius Evola also had things to say on the tradition of Islam that is predominant in areas between those two regions. In his valuable article "Islam in the Eyes of Julius Evola," the Italian Muslim Claudio Mutti pays homage to his ideological father in regards to the latter's views on Islam. Among the aspects he points to in Evola's work is "a direct connection of this tradition to the Primordial tradition itself, such that Islam is independent from both Judaism and Christianity, religions whose characteristic themes he rejects (original sin, redemption, sacerdotal meditation, etc.)."(1)

This conclusion is essential, for it demonstrates the lengths to which Evola not only rejected those who want to separate Islam from the Primordial tradition as something "foreign," but even that he regarded it as superior in certain aspects to other traditions.

So from the outset we must not make the mistake of viewing Islam as a distinct culture, but rather as a filter of cultures that inevitably takes on the vibrant coloring of the people who accept it without detracting any from the message. With this brief but important backdrop to the Islamic tradition, let us now examine how Evola viewed different aspects of Islam.

Islam as Tradition

Evola characterized Islam as "a tradition at a higher level than both Judaism and the religious beliefs that conquered the West."(2) Despite Islam as a message based on the Qur'an and the sunna, or way, of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) being a relatively recent phenomenon, Evola clearly includes it as a manifestation of Tradition.

Islam as an expression of the primordial din al-fitra, or natural way of disposition, is a reality expressed throughout the Qur'an.(3) It recognizes the spiritual foundations of humanity as one, with the various traditions of the world being local expressions of a common primordial origin. "Mankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other."(4)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is regarded by Muslims as last in a line of 124,000 prophets, each sent to a distinct nation and tribe. "Every nation has a Messenger and when their Messenger comes everything is decided between them justly. They are not wronged."(5)

Whereas their messages differed according to time and place, the core message remained the worship of the One God as the basis of human endeavors. Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not only the last prophet, but also the one whose scope was universal such that the Qur'an identifies him as being sent "as a mercy to all the worlds."(6)

There are a number of aspects Evola identifies as part of Islam's primordial links to Tradition. "Although Islam considers itself the 'religion of Abraham,' even to the point of attributing to him the foundation of the Kaaba (in which we find again the theme of the 'stone,' or the symbol of the 'center'), it is nevertheless true that (a) it claimed independence from both Judaism and Christianity; (b) the Kaaba, with its symbolism of the center, is a pre-Islamic location and has even older origins that cannot be dated accurately; (c) in the esoteric Islamic tradition, the main reference point is al-Khadir [Khidr], a popular figure conceived as superior to and predating the biblical prophets (Koran 18:59-81)."(7)

Indeed, a popular tradition identifies the foundations of the Ka'aba being raised by Adam.(8) There is also interesting evidence to consider of the holy city of Makka being described in the Bible(9), thus linking the final relevation to those of the earlier Biblical prophets. As for what Evola terms "symbolism of the center," then this is interesting to compare with the legend of the Grail as the Scottish Sufi master, Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi (Ian Dallas) writes:

"….as the occidental world, unsatisfied spiritually, reached out past Rome and Pope to find its source of healing in the tomb of the redeemer at Jerusalem, as, unsatisfied even there, it cast its yearning gaze, half spiritual, half physical, still further towards the East to find the primal shrine of mankind, so the Grail was said to have been withdrawn from our cynical West to the pure chaste unattainable birthplace of all nations. And so, the Grail was nothing other than the Black Stone of the Ka'aba, the central shrine of the world's largest religion, purified judaeo-christianity, Islam. Makkah is named in the Qur'an as the Mother of Cities, and thus the 'birthplace of all nations' and the Ka'aba is named the 'primal shrine of all mankind.' Embedded in one corner of the Ka'aba stands the Black Stone which every Muslim raises his lips to and kisses when he arrives dusty and exhausted as a pilgrim, kisses as if quenching his thirst."(10)

The Holy Grail can thus be viewed as a metaphor for the spiritual quest, which in Europe extends back to pre-Christian Indo-European and other indigenous traditions. It is certainly no coincidence that Celtic, Germanic and Iberian tribes tended to adopt the gnostic and unitarian expressions of Christianity which can be traced back to remnants of the Primordial Tradition. "According to the pure doctrine of the huda, or ancient guidance that has adhered from the time of our father, Sayyidina Adam, peace be upon him, gnosis lies in the hands of the Prophet of the time….For six hundred years [before the appearance of the Prophet Muhammad] there was a living christian gnostic tradition."(11)

Sufism is the carrier of the primordial spiritual wisdom, as bounded within the final message of that Tradition which is Islam. The inner wisdom was transmitted by the prophets to gnostic communities, and with the end of the line of prophethood this is now transferred to the spiritual pole of the age, or the qutb. The legend of Khidr can be seen here in a similar light as the "Green Man" who transmitted wisdom to seekers in medieval Europe.(12) As we will see later, Islam and specifically Sufism played an important role in shaping European chivalry.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) called others to the worship of the One God, in other words to recapture the primordial Covenant of Alast(13). Towards this end he also sent out letters to leaders, including the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. Although he refrained from accepting Islam, deep within his heart Heraclius felt drawn towards it and kept the letter in a golden casket that was passed down and gave rise to a legend that as long as the letter remained, so too would the kingdom. One Islamic scholar has identified this letter with the Holy Grail.(14)

Doctrines

Evola then moves to the spiritual doctrines of Islam, the highest pillar of which is to testify that there is only one God to be worshipped, without associating any partners to Him. Islam is distinct from all other faiths in how absolute it is in its doctrine of Divine Unity, or tawhid:

"Islam also not only rejected the idea of a Redeemer or Savior, which is so central in Christianity, but also the mediation of a priestly caste. By conceiving of the Divine in terms of an absolute and pure monotheism, without a 'Son,' a 'Father,' or a 'Mother of God,' every person as a Muslim appears to respond directly to God and to be sanctified through the Law, which permeates and organizes life in a radically unitary way in all of its juridical, religious, and social ramifications."(15)

As we shall see, Evola also admires Islam for its action and it is exactly this reality that distinguishes Tawhid from monotheism. "Tawhid is not monotheism, it is not a metaphysical principle. Allah is beyond what is attributed to Him, therefore beyond logos. Allah is not a mono-theos, nor poli-theos, or tri-theos, or a-theos. Allah is not theo-logical or onto-logical. Allah is neither a theory nor a principle. Allah is not contained by definition."(16)

Islam is not a "religion" that is confined to the realm of ideas and principles, but rather a Din or a higher wisdom that is organic in every sense of the word. It is a life transaction between an individual and their Lord, the simplicity of which serves as its greatest strength. It certainly appealed to the French anarchist Gustave-Henri Jossot, who converted to Islam and became a student of the Algerian Sufi master Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi, as "the most rational religion in the world" because it had "no mysteries, no dogmas, no priests, almost no ceremonies."(17)

The Tradition of Scholar-Warriors

"As in the case of priestly Judaism, the center in Islam also consisted of the Law and Tradition, regarded as a formative force, to which the Arab stocks of the origins provided a purer and nobler human material that was shaped by a warrior spirit."(18)

One distinguishing feature of Islam is the access given to the Law, or Shari'a, such that every sincere seeker has the potential within themselves to become scholars of their own right. This is indeed the primary task of Sufism, which is to equip the seekers with the means to triumph over their own ego and through this against their external enemies. This is why the Sufi shaykhs have always been at the

forefront of the struggle against temporal enemies as surely as they provided the wisdom necessary for the seekers to defeat their inner spiritual enemies:

“Such men as the Naqshbandi sheikh Shamil al-Daghestani, who fought a prolonged war against the Russians in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century; Sayyid Muhammad ‘Abdullah al-Somali, a sheikh of the Salihiyya order who led Muslims against the British and Italians in Somalia from 1899 to 1920; the Qadiri sheikh ‘Uthman ibn Fodi, who led jihad in Northern Nigeria from 1804 to 1808 to establish Islamic rule; the Qadiri sheikh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri, who led the Algerians against the French from 1832 to 1847; the Darqawi faqir al-Hajj Muhammad al-Ahrash, who fought the French in Egypt in 1799; the Tijani sheikh al-Hajj ‘Umar Tal, who led Islamic Jihad in Guinea, Senegal, and Mali from 1852 to 1864; and the Qadiri sheikh Ma’ al-‘Aynayn al-Qalqami, who helped marshal Muslim resistance to the French in northern Mauritania and southern Morocco from 1905 to 1909.

“Among the Sufis whose missionary work Islamized entire regions are such men as the founder of the Sanusiyya order, Muhammad ‘Ali Sanusi, whose efforts and jihad from 1807 to 1859 consolidated Islam as the religion of peoples from the Libyan Desert to sub-Saharan Africa; [and] the Shadhili sheikh Muhammad Ma‘ruf and Qadiri sheikh Uways al-Barawi, whose efforts spread Islam westward and inland from the East African Coast.”(19)

Although it is a complex matter whose essence has been distorted by Islamophobes and extremist Wahhabis alike(20), we must also caution against those modernists who subvert Islam and seek to “pacify” it in service of their Zionist and Globalist masters, in order to accomodate it to the global banking system. But as a corollary to this, they also deny the spiritual struggle as this primordial wisdom is contrary to any consumerist vision they support. As Evola writes,

“Islam presents a traditional completeness, since the shariah and the sunna, that is, the exoteric law and tradition, have their complement not in vague mysticism, but in full-fledged initiatory organizations (turuq) that are categorized by an esoteric teaching (tawil) and by the metaphysical doctrine of the Supreme Identity (tawhid).”(21)

It is no accident that these same modernists are generally the same individuals who seek to distort the Sufi Path as not being bounded within orthodox Islam. There is indeed some parallel between Wahhabis and Orientalists who seek to deny that Sufism is founded upon the Prophetic Sunna and the Islamic Shari’a. Sufism is the fulfillment of Tawhid, to purify one’s lower self or ego and to elevate the soul to attain true gnosis, or ma’rifa in the Islamic tradition.

The four stages of understanding within Sufism are the (1) Shari’a, the Law which is the foundation for the next three stages and provides guidance within this world; (2) Tariqa, the inner practices as instructed by a Shaykh with a true path of initiation; (3) Haqiqa, the inner meaning of the practices and guidance found within the Shari’a and Tariqa; and (4) Ma’rifa, the highest stage or gnosis which is superior wisdom or knowledge of spiritual truth. It is a deeper level of knowing beyond haqiqa and is the highest stage of Reality attained by few although each have the potential.(22)

The great Sufi Imam Junayd of Baghdad, who has truly defined the essence of Sufism to an extent that even modern seekers describe themselves as following the path of Junayd, said: "Surely all the paths (turuq) are choked off by the creation except those following the footsteps of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, those following his Sunna and his Tariqa."

One later Sufi who treaded this path of a scholar-warrior, or what Evola would admire as the "asceticism of action," was the Shehu Uthman dan Fodio of West Africa. He defined the scholar-warrior as the one who lived in simplicity and among the people, like all true zahids (people of asceticism) and awliya (friends of Allah). They walked the path and actually lived the Qur'an through their actions.

Umma as a Race of the Spirit

"It is precisely through the holy war, and not through preaching or missionary endeavor, that Islam came to enjoy a sudden, prodigious expansion, originating the empire of the Caliphs as well as forging a unity typical of a race of the spirit, namely, the umma or 'Islamic nation'."(23)

This spiritual nation called the Umma is, in every sense of the word, the fullest expression of the race of the spirit as it is founded on the Idea that is superior to and transcends the blood: "The Idea, only the Idea must be our true homeland. It is not being born in the same country, speaking the same language or belonging to the same racial stock that matters; rather, sharing the same Idea must be the factor that unites us and differentiates us from everybody else."(24) As Claudio Mutti said about the Islamic stance on race:

"Islam affirms in a radical way the prominence of the spiritual factor over the biological; but that does not mean that Islam does not recognize the racial differences at all and does not hold it in account. The Islamic doctrine relative to this argument is expressed synthetically in the following Qur'anic verse: 'Among his signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colors' (XXX, 22). Islam therefore considers 'languages and colors', that is, the factors of cultural and racial identity, as 'divine signs'."(25)

The Islamic Roots of Medieval Chivalry

In his work, The Mystery of the Grail, Evola describes parallels between Sufis and Gnostic communities that survived in Europe into the medieval times. He identified the legend of the Grail with the Ghibelline tradition, as represented by Friedrich II der Hohenstauffen, who built a pan-European imperium and refused Crusades against Muslims and the Cathars in opposition to the Papacy.(26) He then makes reference to the Knights Templars:

"Moreover, the Templars were charged with keeping secret liaisons with Muslims and being closer to the Islamic faith than to the Christian one. This last charge is probably best understood by remembering that Islam too is characterised by the rejection of Christ worship. The "'secret liaisons' allude to a perspective that is less sectarian, more universal, and thus more esoteric than that of

militant Christianity. The Crusades, in which the Templars and in general the Ghibelline chivalry played a fundamental role, in many respects created a supra-traditional bridge West and East. The crusading knighthood ended up confronting a facsimile of itself, namely, warriors who abided by corresponding ethics, chivalrous customs, ideals of a 'holy war,' and initiatory currents'."(27)

Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi described how these knights were devoted to honor, valor, and victory. The Crusades were partly an effort by the Church to break the chivalry code, but interaction with the Middle East intensified it. This took the form of efforts to break the knights' tournament. In the ninth canon of the Council of Clermont in 1130, Pope Innocent II condemned the tournament and commanded knights killed in them not be given Christian burials. But the effort was largely unsuccessful and Pope John XXII reluctantly lifted the ban in 1316. Chivalry, or what Evola would undoubtedly identify as the struggle between the Ghibelline Hohenstauffens and the Papacy, was also symbolized in treatment of women:

"The final element of the new chivalric religion, having replaced a celibate and misogynist priesthood with a new elite brotherhood of warriors, was to introduce the honour due to women. Women were pure by nature and not, as the priests claimed, corrupted vessels of the flesh pulling men down to punishment and death. Part of chivalry was not only the respect due to good women but also the task of protecting them from slander and danger."(28)

Thus, the medieval Christian "knightly attitude towards women is Islamic in origin."(29) In his book on the history of medieval literature, the early nineteenth century French-Swiss historian Jean Charles de Sismondi described how Arabic literature and specifically that written by Sufis, was the source for "that tenderness and delicacy of sentiment and that reverential awe of women….which have operated so powerfully on our chivalrous feelings."(30)

Chivalry manifested within the Indo-European traditions, but experienced decline over the centuries. Just as the Muslims preserved and transmitted ancient texts back to the Europeans, so too was it revived by the Muslims and passed back to the Europeans. "Between the seventh and twelfth centuries it was known among the Arabs, who became the instruments of the revival, in the medieval West, of the older legacy of the pre-Christian wisdom tradition."(31)

Love Is Divine

Islam does not hold "the idea of sexuality as something blameworthy and obscene," to the extent that the Spanish Sufi Shaykh al-Akbar (Great Shaykh) Ibn al-Arabi "goes so far as to speak of a contemplation of God in woman, of a ritualisation of the sexual orgasm in conformity with metaphysical and theological values."(32)

In The Metaphysics of Sex, Evola describes the important role that Love plays in the Sufi Islamic tradition. Ibn al-Arabi says in Fusus al-Hikam that "the dissolution through woman" is the symbol of extinction in Divinity.(33) In applying the masculine symbolism to the seeker's soul, "divinity is

considered as a woman: she is not the 'celestial bride', but the 'Beloved' or the 'Lover'. That is, for instance, the case in Attar, Ibn Farid, Gelaleddin el-Rumi, etc."(34)

Evola admires the idea of love as a "force that kills" the individual self or ego.(35) He then quotes the Persian Sufi Shaykh and poet Jalal ad-Din Rumi, "He who knows the power of the dance of life does not fear death, because he knows that love kills," as representing "the key to the practices of a chain or school of Islamic mysticism that has been transmitted for centuries and which considers Jalal ad-Din Rumi as its master."(36) Evola concludes about divine love:

"In this Sufistic theology of love, one must see the amplification and the elevation to a more lucid conscience of the ritual world with which man from that civilisation has more or less distinctly assumed and experienced conjugal relationships in general, starting from the sanctification which the Qur'anic Law confers to the sexual act in not only a monogamist, but also polygamist structure. Whence derives the special meaning which procreation can acquire, understood precisely as the administration of the prolongation of the divine creating force existing within man."(37)

Imam Ali: A Perfect Example of Chivalry

The Sufis have a culture of chivalry (futuwwa) and courtesy (adab) consciously woven into nearly every aspect of their lives. The key to Islamic chivalry and good manners is to struggle against the ego. "Our master, may Allah be pleased with him, said, 'The truly sincere faqir [impoverished one] is the one who is such that his enemy cannot find a way to injure him. This is his sign since his only constant occupation is his Beloved. His occupation with his Beloved veils him from his enemy. The Lover and the enemy are never joined'."(38)

The Islamic Guilds were based upon futuwwa, and out of this futuwwa grew the tariqas or the orders of Sufism. Many of these guilds were founded by the Caliph An-Nasir and modelled after the character of Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who served as the fourth caliph. The descendents of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, are called the Ahl al-Bait (people of the Household) and hold a special place within Islam.

In addition to his prophethood (nubuwwa) and receiving revelation (wahy), the Prophet (peace be upon him) also possessed the spiritual guidance and initiation (walaya) which he transferred to his Household. This is why the spiritual lineage, or silsila, of nearly all the major Sufi tariqas are transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through Ali and the Household. The earliest Sufi ascetics surrounded themselves with the company of the Household. This is what Evola would consider a true chain of orthodox initiation.

Within the Islamic tradition, what Evola called the "divine kingship" was manifested in the khilafa (caliphate), which was the political leadership. However, there was a second which was the wilaya (spiritual leadership) that manifested within the character of the Prophetic Household. The manifest

caliphs coexisted with the hidden caliphate of Ahl al-Bait, that was a spiritual position designed to transmit the spiritual wisdom down to succeeding generations of seekers.(39)

The perfect combination of physical heroism on the battlefield with a sanctity wholly detached from the worldly life, was personified in the character of Imam Ali. The Qur'anic verse, "You did not kill them; it was Allah who killed them; and you did not throw, when you threw; it was Allah who threw"(40), was revealed during a battle when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) threw a handful of dust towards the enemy.

Rumi also explains it as an inner reality that all actions derive from Allah; actions are "good" only if one is conscious of this reality, and one is effaced in this consciousness.(41) This is similar to a verse from the Bhagavad-Gita: "Who thinks that he can be a slayer, who thinks that he is slain, both these have no [right] knowledge: He slays not, is not slain."(42) Rumi devotes a poem in his Mathnawi to Imam Ali:

"He said, 'I am wielding the sword for Allah's sake, I am the servant of Allah, I am not under the command of the body.

"I am the Lion of Allah, I am not the lion of my passion: my deed bears witness to my religion.

"I have removed the baggage of self out of the way, I have deemed (what is) other than God to be non-existence."(43)

These lines allude to an incident one day when Imam Ali was in battle and his opponent's sword broke. The man fell and Ali stood above him, holding his sword to the man's neck but refusing to kill him, despite the opponent's personal insults. Ali then told him:

"I am not your enemy. The real enemies are the evil qualities within us. You are my brother, yet you spit in my face. When you spat upon me, I became angry, and the arrogance of that came to me. If I had killed you when I was in that state, then I would be a sinner, a murderer. I would have become the very thing I was fighting against. That crime would be recorded against my name, and I would have to answer for it later, when Allah questions me. That is why I cannot slay you."(44)

Imam Ali described the battle that is waged in the soul: The intellect is the leader of the forces of ar-Rahman (the Compassionate); al-hawa (whim, caprice, desire) commands the forces of ash-shaytan (the devil); the soul itself is between them, undergoing the attraction of both (mutajadhiba baynahuma). The soul "enters into the domain of which ever of the two will triumph."(45)

The Greater Jihad

In another section of Revolt Against the Modern World, Evola discusses the hadith (narration from the Prophet), "Raja'na min al-jihad al-asghar ila-l jihad al-akbar" ("You have returned from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle"). While the chain of narrators (isnad) for this hadith has been considered by classical Islamic scholars as being inauthentic(46), the essence of its meaning is

confirmed in several verses from the Qur'an(47), as well as several sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that scholars of hadith have classified as authentic:

"The mujahid is he who makes jihad against his nafs (ego) for the sake of obeying Allah."(48) "The strong one is not the one who overcomes people, the strong one is he who overcomes his nafs [ego]."(49)

It is the inner warfare that distinguishes the true "warriors of the spirit" form the mass of ordinary believers. The Qur'an describes the companions of the right (ashab al-yamin) and the foremost (as-sabiqun). The spirituality of jihad, which is conducted within an established framework, is not synonymous with the modern nihilistic ideology of Jihadism, exactly because in Islam the ends do not justify the means:

"The true warrior of Islam smites the neck of his own anger with the sword of forbearance; the false warrior strikes at the neck of his enemy with the sword of his own unbridled ego. For the first, the spirit of Islam determines jihad; for the second, bitter anger, masquerading as jihad, determines Islam. The contrast between the two could hardly be clearer."(50)

For Evola, this greater and lesser jihad "represents the general conception that the world of Tradition attributes to the warrior experience, and, generally speaking, to action as a path to realisation."(51) As Evola writes in Revolt Against the Modern World:

"The relationship between the 'greater' and the 'lesser holy war,' however, mirrors the relationship between the soul and the body; in order to understand the heroic asceticism or 'path of action,' it is necessary to recognize the situation in which the two paths merge, 'the lesser holy war' becoming the means through which 'a greater holy war' is carried out, and vice versa: the 'little holy war,' or the external one, becomes almost a ritual action that expresses and gives witness to the reality of the first. Originally, orthodox Islam conceived a unitary form of asceticism: that which is connected to the jihad or 'holy war'.

"The 'greater holy war' is man's struggle against the enemies he carries within. More exactly, it is the struggle of man's higher principle against everything that is merely human in him, against his inferior nature and against chaotic impulses and all sorts of material attachments."(52)

This inner struggle is the animalistic instinct, the disorganized multiplicity of impulses, the limitations imposed on us by a fictitious slef, and thus also including fear, wickedness, and uncertainty. Subduing the internal enemy is the only way to achieve inner liberation or the rebirth in a state of deeper inner unity and "peace" in the triumphal sense of the world. In the midst of external jihad, the inner enemy emerges and puts up a fierce resistance through these instincts; it is the task of the true warrior to overcome these instincts before entering the battlefield if he hopes to triumph over his enemies. The intention (niya) is what preserves the sacred character and heroism of jihad.(53)

Parallels with the Indo-European Tradition

Just as with the role of Islamic mysticism in transmitting ancient Indo-European chivalry, so too did Evola see in jihad a "late rebirth of a primordial Aryan heritage," such that "the Islamic tradition serves here as the transmitter of the Aryo-Iranian tradition."(54) There is mention of this reality of the inner struggle in the verses of the Bhagavad-Gita: "Know Him therefore who is above reason; and let his peace give thee peace. Be a warrior and kill desire, the powerful enemy of the soul"(Bhagavad-Gita, 3:43).

Throughout the Qur'an, the verses about striking against the enemies and maintaining the upper hand are presupposed on the verses about sacrificing the illusions of this worldly life for the truth of the struggle. The Hereafter is regarded as the ultimate destination, and those who fall in battle are promised heavenly rewards so long as their intention was pure and they fought within the balance and justice of Shari'a.

There is a parallel here to a saying from the Bible, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). Similar to the saying of the Qur'an that those who are slain are alive in Paradise, is a saying from Plato's The Republic: "And of those who are slain in the field, we shall say that all who fell with honor are of that golden race, who when they die, according to Hesiod, 'Dwell here on earth, pure spirits, beneficent, Guardians to shield us mortal men from harm."(55) Throughout Indo-European traditions can be found this view that the slain warrior becomes immortal. Evola draws parallel between the Islamic view of the martyr (shahid) with the mors triomphalis of the Roman tradition.(56)

Distinguishing Features of Islamic Mysticism

Comparing Christian and Islamic mysticism, Evola notes that what lacks among Christian ascetics is going further than the vows of silence, "the practice of the most interiorised degree of this discipline, that does not only consist of putting an end to the spoken word, but also to thought (Ibn 'Arabi's notion of 'not speaking with oneself')."(57) He compares the practice of Sufi dhikr (remembrance of Allah) with the Hindu mantra and the repetition of sacred names practiced in the Hesychasm of some of the Orthodox Christian and Eastern Catholic churches.(58)

Evola describes these doctrines as "recognizing in man the condition in which the Absolute becomes conscious of itself, and that professes the doctrine of Supreme Identity," so that Islam constitutes "a clear and eloquent example of a system that, although including a strictly theistic domain, recognizes a higher truth and path of realization, the emotional and devotional elements, love and all the rest losing here….every 'moral' signification, and every intrinsic value, acquiring only that of a technique among others."(59)

Within Sufism, "the word qutb, 'pole', does not only designate the sovereign, but, more generally, he who dictates the law and is the head of tradition of a given historical period."(60) The Sufi masters such as Ibn al-Arabi, illustrate "the inversion of roles in relation to the state where, duality having been created, the divine image incarnating the superior I become to the mystic like a different being."(61)

The objective of the Sufi is to be continuously in a state of change, of waging the struggle against the lower self or the ego, and to continuously strive towards elevating the soul towards higher levels seeking the Divine Presence: “It is interesting to note that in Islamic esoterism there is a specific term to indicate that change: shath, which literally means ‘exchange of parts’ and expresses the level at which the mystic absorbs the divine image, feels it as himself and feels himself, instead, as something else, and speaks as a function of that image. There are, in fact, in Islam, certain ‘sure signs’ by which to distinguish the objective shath from a mere illusionary feeling in a person.”(62)

Conclusion

The current author makes reference to his attachment to the faith of Islam, although he remains proud of his European descent. There is no contradiction in the two, but rather through recapturing the essence of Islam that is primordial and a cultural filter, in every sense of the word it is valuable as an internal aid for spiritual awareness that allows him to hold onto the primordial traditions of his ancestors at the same time.

We have focused in Tasawwuf as the latest expression of the timeless spiritual wisdom that was always transmitted through the ages to sincere seekers, usually in the midst of fierce opposition. The way of Islam is the final expression of the previous messengers who were sent to Indo-European nations and tribes, just as the reality of Tasawwuf is further the way of those communities of gnostics and mystics who protected the spiritual wisdom.

Just as these communities were responsible for the best of European art, architecture, literature, chivalry, and music, so too will it be left to a core vanguard of devoted men and women – European in blood, Islamic in faith, Sufi in devotion – to continue planting the seeds of a new Indo-European renaissance. We will do so infused with the doctrines of the Qur’an and its accompanied spiritual wisdom, and through it recapture the essence of what was lost from our primordial traditions.

Islam as Seen By Evola

Claudio Mutti

In these days when there is a lot of shouting about the Third World War, given the recent war events between Iran and the United States, it is back in fashion to talk about "Islam". Obviously it was an opportunity, for mass media and hired opinion leaders, to come up with a long series of nonsense, all functional to reinforce the so-called "Clash of Civilizations". But what is Islam really? We thought that the best way was to leave the word to Julius Evola, in this speech by Claudio Mutti. *

Since the sixtieth anniversary of the Suez War falls in these days, allow me to begin by recalling the considerations that at the time were made by Julius Evola in relation to that episode.

When in 1956, following the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Egypt had to face Anglo-Franco-Zionist aggression, many of those who in the Second World War had fought with the conscience of political soldiers against the "democratic plutocracies of" West ”saw in Egypt a new front line against their own enemies and expressed their solidarity with the Egyptian people and their Rais, Gamal Abd el-Nasser (1).

nasser-egypt-islamIn fact, in the Italian fascist circles of the 1950s, the memory of the pro-Islamic position taken by Italy during the twenty years and of the solidarity that had been established between the Axis forces and the independence movements of the Muslim world during the years of the world conflict was still alive. . The Verona Manifesto, to which a large part of the militants of post-war fascism continued to refer, had indicated among the essential points of the foreign policy of CSR the "absolute respect for those peoples, especially Muslims who, like Egypt, are already civilly and rationally organized ".

And precisely in Egypt, in the 1950s, the revolution of the Free Officers, after having driven out the king enslaved to Great Britain, proclaimed the republic (18 June 1953), abolished the party power, launched a vast program of reforms, nationalized foreign capital, expelled the British from the Suez Canal, refused military alliances functional to imperialist domination, granted asylum and aid to the exiles of defeated Germany, he undertook to build a national socialism which, according to the Nasserian project of unity of the Arab Nation, should have become a genuine pan-Arab socialism, based on the spiritual assumptions provided by Islam.

Julius Evola, who at the time actively collaborated with the press organs of the so-called "national alignment", on March 3, 1957 published an article in the "Meridiano d'Italia" that bore this title: The emancipation of Islam is a road to communism . The same article, with a few more comma and a few less semicolons, was re-proposed the following year, on June 25, 1958, to the readers of the newspaper “Roma”, which was published in Naples.

First of all, writes Evola, the neofascists, who look with sympathy " the irredentist movements of the Arab peoples and the Egyptian initiatives themselves" , commit the error of indiscriminately attacking colonialism, "forgetting how it was linked up to yesterday to the very principle of hegemony of the white race " . Secondly, she writes, "the danger that the said independence movements will naturally end up

in the waters of communism is quite evident" ; and Nasserian Egypt, according to Evola, would be the most advanced Arab country on this dangerous road. To the positions represented by Nasserism and the other liberation movements of the Islamic world, Evola contrasts what he believes would be "orthodox Islam", which, in his opinion, "is still defended by Saudi Arabia and the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood. ", Even if the latter, he adds, have included in their program " very strong reformist and radical social ideas " .

usa-saudia-obamaIt is difficult to find in the author of these statements the same Evola who twenty years earlier had dealt with the problematic nature of the "supremacy of the white race" in a much more critical way (2). It is even more difficult to understand how Evola could attribute a character of Islamic orthodoxy to a country such as Saudi Arabia , ruled by a faction that throughout the Muslim world, both Sunni and Shiite, has always been mostly regarded as sectarian and heterodox. . Furthermore, it is really strange that just a scholar like him, inclined to explore the background of historical facts and to denounce the plots of the "occult war", overlooked the fact that Saudi Arabia was born from the more or less occult operations of Great Britain, interested in hurling the Arabs against the Ottoman Empire and guaranteeing control of the Arabian peninsula; and that he overlooked the fact that the Saudi monarchy had now become an important pawn of US imperialism. This is largely explained by the fact that Evola had established that the West, to use his words, certainly not "in the context of an idea", but in a tactical reconnaissance of contingent circumstances, represented the "lesser evil" (3). In fact, the main enemy, as is well known, was communism for him, which many, even in good faith, considered a real risk, despite the evidence of the situation of objective complicity established in Yalta between the Americans and the Soviets.

Thus the obsession with communism led him, like so many others, to see the Bolshevik danger even where it did not exist : as, precisely, in Nasser's Egypt, where the communist party had been banned and its leaders , who were mostly Jews and therefore suspected of intelligence with the Zionist enemy, had been placed in a position not to harm.

In Evola's article, on the other hand, a point that the author himself considers "essential" seems more realistic and founded by him in the following terms, highlighted by italics: " the Islamic peoples themselves are not making themselves independent from the West that inasmuch as they become westernized, that is, inasmuch as they are spiritually and culturally subjected to the Western invasion ". In other words, Evola continues, "they do not materially emancipate themselves except by largely abandoning their own traditions and constituting themselves more or less imperfect facsimiles of Western states " . In short, if Evola was not completely wrong when he noticed that the political emancipation of colonized Muslim countries was often accompanied by the adoption of cultural elements extraneous to Islamic culture, he was wrong when he argued that Westernization would bring Muslim countries into his arms. of communism.

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What Evola wrote in 1956 constitutes a further confirmation of the need to distinguish the Evola as a political observer from the Evola scholar of the traditional world, since, in the face of the positions that emerge from the article on which I have dwelled, the Evolian work contains pages far from trivial in relation to the doctrine and civilization of Islam. We must therefore ask ourselves what knowledge Evola had of Islam, what elements he had somehow assimilated from it and what was, in his perspective, the specific position of the Islamic tradition.

The picture of the Islamic tradition traced by Evola in his main work, Revolt against the modern world (1934), does not occupy more than a couple of pages, but presents with sufficient prominence those aspects of Islam that from the evolving point of view are worth to characterize it. as, I quote literally, "a tradition of a higher level not only to Judaism, but also to the beliefs that conquered the West" (4), that is to say to the Christian religion.

In the first place Evola points out how the symbolism of Islam clearly indicates a direct reconnection with the primordial Tradition itself, so that Islam is independent of Judaism and Christianity, religions of which it rejects the particular themes: original sin , redemption, priestly mediation and so on. It is worth reading the evoliano passage directly:

As in priestly Judaism, here at the center is law and tradition as a formative force , to which, however, the Arab stocks of the origins offered a much purer, noble material, marked by a warrior spirit. Islamic law, shariyah , is divine law; its basis, the Koran, is conceived as the very word of God - kalâm Allâh - as a non-human work, an "uncreated" book, existing ab aeterno in the heavens. If Islam considers itself as "the religion of Abraham" and he also wanted to be the founder of the Kaaba , where the "stone" occurs, the symbol of the "Center", however, the fact remains that it affirms its independence from Judaism no less than from Christianity, that the center of the Kaaba with that same symbol is pre-Islamic and has remote origins that are difficult to determine; that in the Islamic esoteric tradition the reference point is the mysterious figure of Khidr , conceived as superior and anterior to the biblical prophets. Islam excludes the characteristic theme of Judaism, which in Christianity will become the dogma and basis of the Christic mystery: it maintains, considerably weakened, the theme of the fall of Adam, without however drawing from it that of "original sin". (...) Thus the idea of "redeemers" or "saviors", the center of Christianity, not only, is also rejected, but the mediation of a priestly caste is excluded. (5)

Revolt against the modern world2-evolaThe radical formulation of the doctrine of Unity, the absence of any stain of anthropomorphism, the restoration of the primordial direct contact with the Principle, the integration of every sector of existence into a ritual order, the asceticism of the action culminating in the rite of jihâd , the ability to shape a "race of the spirit" in terms of ummah , an Arabic term that indicates the community founded on the same spiritual orientation: these are the aspects of Islam on which Evola's attention subsequently focuses. Let us again read the prose of Revolt against the modern world :

Conceived of the Divine in absolute monotheistic purity , without a "Son", without a quality of "Father", without a "Mother of God", every man as a muslem appears directly connected to God and sanctified through the law, which permeates and organizes life in all its juridical, religious and social expressions is something absolutely unitary. As mentioned, in the original Islam the only form of asceticism that was

conceived was that of action, in terms of jihad, of "holy war", war, theoretically, never to be interrupted, until the full consolidation of divine law. And precisely through the holy war, not through an action of preaching and apostolate, Islam had a sudden, prodigious expansion, forming not only the Empire of the Caliphs, but above all the unity proper to a race of the spirit - umma - the "Islamic nation". (6)

Lastly, Evola observes, Islam is a complete traditional form , in the sense that in its context an esotericism is alive and operative capable of providing, to those with the necessary qualifications, the means to achieve a spiritual realization that goes beyond the exoteric goal of pure and simple "salvation of the soul".

Finally, Islam presents a traditionally high degree of completeness in that the world of Shariyah and Sunna, of law and tradition, has its complement not so much in a mysticism, but in real initiatory organizations - turuq - which it belongs to. the esoteric teaching, the ta'wil and the metaphysical doctrine of the supreme Identity , tawhid . The notion, recurrent in such organizations and, in general, in the so-called Shia, of the ma'sum , of the double prerogative of the isma , or doctrinal infallibility, and of the impossibility of being affected by guilt, for the leaders, the visible and invisible Imams, and the mujtahids , it logically falls within the truth of an unbroken race formed by a tradition of a level superior not only to Judaism, but also to the beliefs that conquered the West. (7)

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We have mentioned jihâd . Evola follows the widespread custom of rendering the Arabic term with the abused expression "holy war" and defines jihâd as the only form of asceticism conceived by the original Islam. We will note that the Evolian definition takes up the concept expressed by a traditional saying - a hadîth - of the Prophet Muhammad, according to which "the asceticism of Islam is the jihâd ". In this regard, it is important to note that Revolt against the modern world contains a chapter, entitled The great and the small holy war , in which Evola's debt to a book by René Guénon is evident (and indeed declared).Le symbolisme de la Croix , in particular the chapter entitled La guerre et la paix . In this chapter of Revolt against the modern world the author refers to a particular aspect of the doctrine concerning the jihâd , an aspect that is indicated precisely by the title The great and the small holy war .

In the context of Evoliano's work this notion of "great and small holy war" occupies a very important place, also because Evola attributes to it a paradigmatic value. The notion of "great and small holy war", in fact, exemplifies and represents, for Evola, the general conception that the world of Tradition refers to the warrior experience and, in a broader sense, to action understood as a way of spiritual realization.

What is the importance that the doctrine of the great and small holy war has for Evola can be deduced from the fact that he often takes up this concept when he has to illustrate the ascesis of action. For example, he took it up and developed it a few years after the first edition of Rivolta , precisely on 7 December 1940, in a lecture he gave in German in the Science of Civilization section of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut , at Palazzo Zuccari in Rome.

On this occasion Evola says: “It should not be surprising if we refer above all to the Islamic tradition. The Islamic tradition stands here in the place of the Ario-Iranian. [Die islamische Tradition steht hier am Platze der arisch-iranischen] The idea of 'holy war' (...) had, therefore, at the same time, the meaning of the late Renaissance of a primordial air inheritance [Die Idee des 'heiligen Kampfes' (…) Hatte also gleichsam die Bedeutung der späteren Renaissance eines altarischen Erbgutes] and, from this point of view, it can certainly be used "(8).

To the doctrine of the great and the small holy war, therefore, Evola entrusts the task of representing the traditional conception relating to the warrior experience and, in a broader sense, to action understood as a way of spiritual realization. The teachings concerning warrior action that are found in different traditional fields (for example in the Bhagavad Gîtâ and in the Templar doctrine) are considered by Evola in the light of their convergence with the Islamic doctrine of the jihâd and are exposed through the use of a notion which is also of Islamic derivation: the notion of the "Way of God" (sabîl Allâh is the corresponding Koranic expression). The formula used by Evola to refer to this doctrine originates from a famous hadîth of the Prophet Muhammad, who, on his return from a military campaign, said: " Raja'nâ min al-jihâd al-açghar ilâ 'l-jihâd al-akbar ”That is:“ We have returned from the least effort to the greatest effort ”. ("Effort", in fact, is the literal meaning of the term jihâd , which is commonly rendered as "holy war").

Evola comments on this hadîth as follows:

In the Islamic tradition, two holy wars are distinguished: one is the 'great holy war' - al-jihâdul akbar - the other the 'little holy war' - al-jihâdul açghar (...) The great war is of internal order and spiritual; the other is the material war, the one that is fought externally against an enemy people (…) However , the 'great holy war' is to the 'little holy war' as the soul is to the body ; and it is fundamental for the understanding of heroic asceticism to understand the situation in which the two become one, the 'little holy war' becoming the means through which a 'great holy war' is carried out and vice versa: the 'little holy war' - the external one - almost becoming a ritual actionwhich expresses and testifies to the reality of the former. In fact, Orthodox Islam originally conceived only one form of asceticism: that which is linked precisely to the jihâd, to the 'holy war'. The 'great holy war' is man's struggle against the enemies he carries within himself. More precisely, it is the struggle of the non-human element of man against all that is in him of (…) governed by the principle of chaos and disorder . (9).

Later it continues like this:

In the world of traditional warrior ascesis the "little holy war", that is the external war, is pointed out or even prescribed as a way to carry out this "great holy war" and for this reason in Islam "holy war" - jihad - and " way of Allah ”are terms often used interchangeably. In this order of ideas, action rigorously has the function and task of a sacrificial and purifying rite. (...) Naturally, the spiritual orientation, the "right direction" - niyyah - which is that directed to the supraindividual states of being (symbols: the "sky", the "paradise", the "gardens of Allah", and so on) is presupposed as a basis; otherwise the war loses its sacred character and degrades into a wild and irrational story where the Warrior is replaced by the soldier and the "hero" in the ancient sense by the beast, or, at most, the exalted one. (10)

Evola reports a whole series of Koranic passages relating to the concepts of jihâd and "Way of Allah"; alongside them are also cited, by way of example and illustrative, two maxims: "Heaven is in the shadow of swords" and "The blood of heroes is closer to God than the ink of philosophers and the prayers of devotees" (11).

Now, if the first of these two maxims is actually a hadîth , the second, taken from a source of which Evola does not provide the extremes, originally sounds in somewhat different terms: "The ink of the wise and the blood of the martyrs will be weighed in the Day of the Resurrection, and the balance will tilt in favor of the wise " (hadîth referred to by Suyûtî, Al-jâmi 'aç-çaghîr).

Before going on to expose the formulations according to which the doctrine of the "holy war" was enunciated in traditional spheres other than the Islamic one (especially in the Hindu and Christian ones), Evola identifies a relationship of analogy between the death achieved by the mujâhid and the mors triumphalis of the Roman tradition (12); the theme is taken up later, where the "meaning of immortalization" (13) attributed to warrior victory by certain European traditions is closely related to "the Islamic idea, according to which the warriors killed in the 'holy war' - jihad - they would never really die "(14).

In this regard Evola quotes a Koranic verse: “Do not say dead those who were killed in the way of God; no, indeed they are alive, but you do not realize it " (II, 149) (14bis). He indicates the convergence of this verse with a passage from Plato 's Republic (Resp. 468 e) in which it is said - I quote Evola's words - that "some dead in war join the golden race which, according to Hesiod, it is never dead, but it subsists and is awake, invisible ” (15).

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Another topic that, in Revolt against the modern world , provides the starting point for some references to the doctrine of Islam is the one dealt with in the chapter on “The Law, the State, the Empire”. Noting that even in medieval civilization the rebellion against the authority and the imperial law was considered in the same title as the religious heresy and the rebels were worth, no less than the heretics, as the enemies of their own nature, as those who contradict the law of their own essence , (16)

Evola notes the presence of a similar conception in Islam. Another parallel involving Islam is then established between the Roman conception on the one hand, which contrasts the law and the pax of the imperial ecumene with the naturalism of the barbarians while claiming the universality of its own law, and the Islamic doctrine from 'other. In fact, in the latter, he writes, we have

On a similar basis (...) the geographical distinction between dar al-islam, or land of Islam, governed by divine law, and dar al-harb, or land of war, to include peoples, which in the former must be taken up through the jihad, the "holy war ". (17)

In the same chapter, dealing with the imperial function of Alexander the Great, subjugator of the hordes of Gog and Magog, Evola refers to the Koranic figure of Dhû'l-qarnayn (the Bicorne, who is currently identified with Alexander), as well as to sura XVIII of the Koran . (18)

* * *

The similarities between certain aspects of Islam and the corresponding elements of other traditional fields are also found in the Mystery of the Grail ; but, while in Rivolta we are dealing with pure doctrinal parallels, which sometimes see traditional forms that have never come into contact with the Muslim world compared with Islam, in the essay on the "Ghibelline imperial idea" the similarities between Islam and Templarism are instead pointed out in the picture of the relationships that would have existed between exponents of Christian esotericism and Islamic esotericism:

furthermore, the Templars were accused of having secret agreements with Muslims and of being closer to the Islamic faith than to the Christian one. This last hint is probably to be understood on the basis of the fact that anti-Christolatry also characterizes Islam. As for "secret understandings", they must appear to us to be synonymous with a less sectarian, more universal, and therefore more esoteric point of view than that of militant Christianity. itself, that is to warriors who had the same ethics, the same chivalrous customs, the same ideals of a "holy war" and, in addition, to corresponding esoteric veins . (19)

The mystery of the grail-evolaEvola thus goes on to draw a summary profile of what he, with a certain impropriety, defines "the Arab Order of the Ishmaelites" , that is the movement of Shiite origin born in the middle of the century. VIII:

Thus the Templars were exactly matched in Islam by the Arab Order of the Ishmaelites, who also considered themselves as the "guardians of the Holy Land" (even in an esoteric, symbolic sense) and had a double hierarchy, one official and one secret. (...) It is also interesting that the same theme of the Ghibelline imperial saga reappears in the Ishmaelite esotericism: the Islamic dogma of the "resurrection" (qiyama) here is interpreted as the new manifestation of the Supreme Head (Imam) who became invisible in the so-called period of "Absence" (ghayba) (20).

Islamic esotericism is defined by Evola as "a doctrine which even comes to recognize in man the condition in which the Principle becomes aware of himself, and which professes the Supreme Identity" (21), so that, thanks to it, the Islam constitutes a clear and eloquent example of a system which, while including a strictly theistic religious domain, recognizes a higher truth and a way of realization, the emotional and devotional element, love and the rest, losing (...) all meaning " moral "and any intrinsic value and acquiring only that of one of the many techniques . (22)

Well, Islamic esotericism, with its complex of notions and symbols, provides Evola with various ideas and references.

As far as symbols and motifs related to Sufism are concerned, it is worth noting, for example, the importance assigned to the polar theme in the Evolian work. In this regard Evola writes that "the term Qutb , 'pole', has designated not only the sovereign but, more generally, the one who gives law and is the head of the tradition of a given historical period" (23). (To be exact, the Qutb represents the supreme apex of the initiatory hierarchy).

Well, there is an entire chapter in Rivolta , the third of the first part, which focuses on this traditional function and uses precisely the terms "pole" and "polar"; the strange thing is that there is no explicit reference to the Islamic tradition in it.

In the end, if we want to take stock, Evola draws a picture of the Islamic tradition which, if it is sometimes inaccurate in its details and is often conditioned by its "personal equation", nevertheless constitutes a representation inspired by the convinced recognition of what is essentially the Islam, beyond all the deformations and deviations known from it throughout its history and especially today: a manifestation of the traditional spirit which cannot ignore what Evola has called the "revolt against the modern world".

Note

1) Among those who recognized one of the forms of post-war fascism in Nasserian national socialism was Maurice Bardèche, of whom we report some passages below. "'Raise your head, brother, the days of humiliation are past.' With this phrase, which would be adapted to Germany in 1934, Nasser announced on the walls of Cairo, in 1954, the advent of a new era. Twenty years later, another people broke their chains. (…) The structure of the republic of Egypt reproduces the characteristics of the fascist political structure. The head of state gathers the various powers in his hands, (…) the political parties are dissolved and contact with the people is maintained through the single party, the National Union. (…) But looking even better, we find in Nasser's regime visible characters of pre-war fascism. In particular, that character of fascism (...) from which the inspiration of a fascist movement and the idea that the latter has of its mission is recognized. In every fascism there is a moral and an aesthetic (...) Nasser and his fascists found this fascist mysticism in Islam (...) In the Koran there is something warrior and strong, something virile, something that can be called Roman. Therefore Nasser is so well understood by the Arabs; he speaks the language that speaks their race in the depths of their hearts "(M. Bardèche, something that can be called Roman. Therefore Nasser is so well understood by the Arabs; he speaks the language that speaks their race in the depths of their hearts "(M. Bardèche, something that can be called Roman. Therefore Nasser is so well understood by the Arabs; he speaks the language that speaks their race in the depths of their hearts "(M. Bardèche,What is fascism? , Rome 1980, pp. 88-92).

(2) J. Evola, The Problem of the Supremacy of the White Race , "The State", July 1936; rest. in J. Evola, The State (1934-1943) , Rome 1995, pp. 151-160.

(3) J. Evola , Orientations. Eleven points , Padua 2000, p. 24.

(4) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , Milan 1951, p. 324

(5) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , Bocca, Milan 1951, p. 323.

(6) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., Pp. 323-324.

(7) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 324.

(8) It should not come as a surprise if we primarily refer to the Islamic tradition. Here the Islamic tradition takes the place of the Aryan-Iranian. The idea of the 'holy fight' (...) had the meaning of the later renaissance of an altar heritage and can be used from this point of view without further ado " J. Evola, Die Arischen Lehr von Kampf und Sieg , Vienna 1941, p. 14; J. Evola, La dottrina aria di lotta e vittoria , Padova sd [ma: 1968], p. 15

(9) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , Rome 1951, pp. 171-172.

(10) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., Pp. 172-173. See also, by the same author, The doctrine of the air of struggle and victory , cit., P. 16 and Philosophical Diorama , Rome 1974, pp. 307-308.

(11) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 180. Cf. Philosophical Diorama , cit., P. 308, where the second maxim is given in a somewhat different form.

(12) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 174.

(13) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 193

(14) Ibidem.

(14b) "And the righteous are the ones whom Allah knows; but the ahya'un wa lakin la tash'urun" (II, 149).

(15) Ibidem.

(16) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., Pp. 52-53.

(17) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 59.

(18) J. Evola, Revolt against the modern world , cit., P. 58.

(19) J. Evola, The mystery of the Grail , Milan 1962, p. 147.

(20) J. Evola, The mystery of the Grail , cit., Pp. 147-148.

(21) J. Evola, East and West , Milan 1984, p. 212.

(22) Ibidem.

(23) J. Evola, Recognitions. Men and problems , Rome 1974, p. 50.

* In 2016, the conference "Julius Evola, an ever-present thinker" was held in Brescia, in front of a room packed with about seventy people, organized by the International Study Center Dimore della Sapienza , to which interventions were made, after the introduction by Paolo Rada, Claudio Mutti and Enzo Iurato . We have thus reported to our readers the text of the speech given by Claudio Mutti, concerning Evola's relationship with Islam.

HERITAGE